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California Jewish Community Oral History Series

Ludwig Altman

A WELL-TEMPERED MUSICIAN'S UNFINISHED JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

With an Introduction by
Dr. Robert Kirschner

Interviews Conducted by
Eleanor K. Glaser
and
Caroline Crawford
in 1988

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LUDWIG ALTMAN
January 1990

Photograph by Caroline Crawford

Cataloging Information

Altman, Ludwig (b. 1910) Musician

A Well-Tempered Musician's Unfinished Journey Through Life, 1990, viii, 183 pp.

Recollections of life in Germany and the rise of Nazism; training at the State Academy for Church and School Music; employment as organist with the WPA Orchestra in San Francisco, the Temple Emanu-El, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, the Legion of Honor, the BBC, the San Francisco Pops Orchestra; Congregation Beth Israel; Second Church of Christ, Scientist, Berkeley; the Carmel Bach Festival; teaching at the University of California, Berkeley; reflections on the Jewish community in San Francisco; works for mechanical organ; original compositions for organ.

Introduction by Robert Kirschner, Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco.

Interviewed 1988 by Eleanor Glaser and Caroline Crawford for the California Jewish Community Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

DEDICATION

To Congregation Emanu-El

and

In Memory of Rabbi Joseph Asher

To Emmy

There is one person who must be mentioned on every page. I am speaking of my Emmy, my Pumpchen, my Emmle, my Gutele.

I was thirty when we met by chance. Since I tend to delay making up my mind I had thought that I would probably stay single, having gotten too old for married bliss. And there it was, love at first sight! After three weeks I proposed and my Emmy answered with her characteristic directness: "I want a sandwich."

Rabbi Reichert and Cantor Rinder officiated at our wedding, Jan Popper was the organist, and his wife Betty, the vocalist, sang Beethoven's "I Love Thee."

Dearest Emmy, thanks and thanks and please God nie schlechter for this union of two better halves.

--Ludwig Altman

Donors to the Ludwig Altman Oral History

The Judah L. Magnes Museum and The Bancroft Library, in behalf of future researchers, wish to thank the following persons whose contributions made possible this oral history of Ludwig Altman. Special thanks to Rabbi Robert Kirschner, Norman Coliver, and Daniel E. Stone for their leadership.

Mrs. Ludwig Altman
Congregation Emanu-El
Joseph Ehrman, III
Lynn Fertman
Saul Greenstein
Sally and Mike Kahn
Mr. Harold J. Kaufman
Mrs. Muriel Leff
Mr. and Mrs. Richard N. Levy
Mrs. Robert C. Levy
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond A. Marks
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Newman
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PREFACE

The California Jewish Community Series is a collection of oral history interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to Jewish life and to the wider community. Sponsored by the Western Jewish History Center of the Judah L. Magnes Museum, the interviews have been produced by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library. Moses Rischin, professor of history at California State University at San Francisco, is advisor to the series,and Ruth Rafael is Archivist. Serving as an advisory committee is the board of the Western Jewish History Center. Present [WJHC Advisory Committee] members are: Chairperson, Dana Shapiro; Vice-Chairperson, Sue Rayner Warburg; William Brinner, Norman Coliver, Barbara Gronowski, James D. Hart, Louis H. Heilbron, Jane R. Lurie, Esther Reutlinger, Jacques Reutlinger, John F. Rothmann, Louise Sampson, and Ruth Freeman Solomon; and ex-officio members Seymour Fromer and Gary J. Shapiro.

The California Jewish Community Series was inaugurated in 1967. During its first twenty years, former board members who have served in an advisory capacity include: Harold Edelstein, Cissie Geballe, James M. Gerstley, Douglas E. Goldman, Philip E. Lilienthal, Elinor Mandelson, Robert E. Sinton, Frank H. Sloss, Daniel E. Stone, Jacob H. Voorsanger, and Alma Lavenson Wahrhaftig.

In the oral history process, the interviewer works closely with the memoirist in preliminary research and in setting up topics for discussion. The interviews are informal conversations which are tape recorded, transcribed, edited by the interviewer for continuity and clarity, checked and approved by the interviewee, and then final-typed. The resulting manuscripts, indexed and bound, are deposited in the library of the Western Jewish History Center, The Bancroft Library, and the University of California at Los Angeles. By special arrangement copies may be deposited in other manuscript repositories holding relevant collections.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The Office, headed by Willa K. Baum, is under the administrative supervision of Professor James D. Hart, director of The Bancroft Library.

Seymour Fromer
Executive Director
The Magnes Museum

1 August 1990
Berkeley, California

CALIFORNIA JEWISH COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORY SERIES
OF THE JUDAH L. MAGNES MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Altman, Ludwig, A Well-Tempered Musician's Unfinished Journey Through Life. 1990. 187 pp.

Fleishhacker, Mortimer, and Janet Choynski (Mrs. Mortimer), Family, Business and the San Francisco Community. 1975. 411 pp.

Fromm, Alfred, Alfred Fromm: Wines, Music and Lifelong Education. 1988. 263 pp.

Haas, Elise Stern (Mrs. Walter, Sr.), The Appreciation of Quality. 1975. 209 pp.

Haas, Walter A., Sr., Civic, Philanthropic, and Business Leadership. 1975. 162 pp.

Hilborn, Walter S., Reflections on Legal Practice and Jewish Community Leadership: New York and Los Angeles, 1907-1973. 1974. 226 pp.

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Kuhn, Marshall H., Marshall H. Kuhn: Catalyst and Teacher: San Francisco Jewish and Community Leader, 1934-1978. 1978. 364 pp.

Magnin, Rabbi Edgar F., Leader and Personality. 1975. 317 pp.

Rinder, Rose (Mrs. Reuben R.), Music, Prayer, and Religious Leadership: Temple Emanu-El, 1913-1969. 1971. 184 pp.

Salz, Helen Arnstein (Mrs. Ansley), Sketches of an Improbable Ninety Years. 1975. 272 pp.

Schnier, Jacques, A Sculptor's Odyssey. 1987. 313 pp.

Sinton, Edgar, Jewish and Community Service in San Francisco, a Family Tradition 1978. 223 pp.

Stone, Sylvia L., Lifelong Volunteer in San Francisco. 1983. 134 pp.

Treguboff, Sanford M., Administration of Jewish Philanthropy in San Francisco 1988. 243 pp.

INTRODUCTION by Dr. Robert Kirschner

The Skinner pipe organ of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, built in 1926, contains some fifty voices and seventy-five ranks. This magnificent, four-manual organ is an aesthetic and mechanical wonder. Aside from its pipes, valves, and wind chests, it contains literally thousands of moving parts. To the inexpert eye, the multitude of keyboard and console controls would seem to demand several musicians at once. Multiple memory, combination action, tremulants and concussions: the instrument itself is a marvel,and how much more so the organist who is its master.

Ludwig Altman is its master. For half a century of Sabbaths, High Holydays, festivals and concert recitals, he served as Temple Emanu-El's Organist and Choir Director nonpareil. His musical artistry, instrumental virtuosity, and technical finesse have inspired two generations of Reform Jewish worship in San Francisco.

Nor have his gifts been confined to the synagogue. For over thirty years he performed with the San Francisco Symphony, and his recitals at the Legion of Honor have become a municipal tradition. His summer concert tours have received glowing acclaim in London, Berlin, Munich, Lausanne, and other major venues. Among the rare breed of world-class organists, Ludwig Altman is one of the elite, and among these he is, to my knowledge, one of the very few who are Jews.

To portray Ludwig as a musician only is scarcely to convey the breadth of his talents. Working at the side of the distinguished Cantors Reuben Rinder and Joseph Portnoy, Ludwig was intimately acquainted with the commission and performance of major new works of music composed for the synagogue, including the Avodath Hakodesh of Ernest Bloch and the Sacred Service of Darius Milhaud. A noted composer in his own right, Ludwig has written numerous scores of sacred music for cantor, choir and organ, several of which have become enduring standards of the Congregation's liturgy. Owing to his modesty, few congregants know that Ludwig is also a musicologist of international reputation, having edited and published first editions of previously unknown organ works of Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Telemann.

Very early in his career, Ludwig's genius was evident. Upon the completion of courses at the State Academy for Sacred Music in Berlin, he was selected as the organist of the Neue Synagogue on Oranienburger-strasse, the largest synagogue in Germany. He was only twenty-three years old. Tragically the glorious history of Jewish life in Berlin was

soon to be extinguished. But to the consolation of American Jewry, Ludwig Altman, together with such luminaries as Max Janowski, Herbert Fromm and Samuel Adler, emigrated to our shores. Their impact on the music of the American synagogue has been incalculable.

Temple Emanu-El's Skinner organ has been praised for its "unobstructed clarity and beauty." This phrase describes Ludwig Altman's personal character no less than his music. Gentle, soft-spoken, unfailingly gracious, Ludwig is held in the Congregation's deepest affection. Together with his devoted wife Emmy, he is a uniquely cherished colleague and friend. His sensitivity, his charm and refinement, his elegant wit -- these are gifts that transcend even his music.

By his life and by his labors, Ludwig Altman has earned a permanent and unforgettable place in the annals of San Francisco Jewry.

Dr. Robert Kirschner
Rabbi

December 1989
Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco

INTERVIEW HISTORY

In 1989 Ludwig Altman marked his fiftieth year as one of the Bay Area's most prominent musicians. During his long and remarkable career, Mr. Altman served as organist of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco from 1937, the year he left Germany to escape Nazism, until 1986. He was for thirty-three seasons organist with the San Francisco Symphony, performed with the Carmel Bach Festival for many years and in various European countries during the summer months for nearly a quarter century, and continues to give weekend recitals on the venerable 1924 Skinner organ at San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor. He has also devoted much of his time to composing and editing works for organ and to music for mechanical organ, a great interest of his.

Ludwig Altman was born in 1910 in Breslau, where he received his early musical training. From the University of Breslau, he went on to train at the University of Berlin and the State Academy for Church and School Music, supporting himself in part by reviewing musical events for Berlin newspapers and performing in small orchestras and synagogues. Denied his diploma by the Nazis, he turned to liturgical organ music and by 1936 he was appointed principal organist at the Neue Synagogue on Oranienburgerstrasse, Berlin, a highly-ornamented structure built to hold 3,000 people and the largest Jewish synagogue still in operation in those years.

Because of his long involvement in and contribution to the field of liturgical music, Mr. Altman was selected to be interviewed for the Judah L. Magnes Museum's California Jewish Community Series, carried out by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library. Two staff editors interviewed Mr. Altman: Caroline Crawford talked to him about music and Eleanor Glaser emphasized his personal life and community involvement. In some instances, Mr. Altman covered the same topic from different perspectives.

A preliminary interview was held in February, 1988, in Temple Emanu-El, where Mr. Altman took us behind the bimah, the altar, demonstrated the workings of the organ, and talked about sound adjustments that had been necessary after the temple was plastered inside to modify the reverberation. Next, he led us up several flights of stairs to his office on the temple's top floor, where he showed us his library of music, and where we discussed the topics to be covered in the interview sessions to come.

The interviews were held in the Altman home in San Francisco's Golden Gate Heights District. The living room is dominated by a large Steinway grand piano, music, and books about music and art. On the piano is the first edition of Beethoven's organ works, collected and edited by Mr. Altman, and the score of the Sacred Service he composed for Temple Emanu-El in 1963.

This intensely cultural life is shared with Emmy, his wife of nearly fifty years. When they met, Emmy Hausdorff was teaching at the Dominican School in San Rafael; she subsequently taught in the San Francisco public school system. She attends all her husband's performances and keeps his busy calendar, and their devotion to each other is obvious. During one interview, Mr. Altman stated, "I'm bright, but Emmy is a genius."

Altogether Mr. Altman recorded seven interviews with us. When the edited transcripts were sent to him, he expanded the material substantially. These additions were written in a conversational tone in keeping with the interview format, and they are noted in the text of the memoir. His attention to detail and his diligence is reflective of his work habits. It perhaps also demonstrates Mr. Altman's editorial expertise, sharpened by his years as a music critic in the 1930s. "...I would almost say that that was my strongest suit, being a music critic and music reviewer, and under normal conditions in Germany, I would have followed that as my career," he said.

Also in this memoir, Ludwig Altman contrasts the educational systems of Germany and the United States, describes German radio programming, and offers insights into fellow musicians and to composers, rabbis and cantors.

Mr. Altman has said of himself that he is an ordinary musician who was blessed with extreme good fortune. He also acknowledges his devotion to sheer hard work: "...practically seven days, day and night, nonstop." Speaking of his need to make a contribution, he says, "...whatever I have done I was always possessed by that mania, almost, that it must be an addition, it must be a contribution. Also when I played the organ recitals, I always felt, "if I cannot make a contribution, why do it at all."

This memoir captures Mr. Altman's dedication to hard work and his contributions to music in San Francisco, elsewhere in California, and in Europe.

Eleanor K. Glaser
Caroline C. Crawford

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University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name Ludwig Altman

Date of birth September 2, 1910 Place of birth Breslau, Germany

Father's full name Eugen Altman

Birthplace East Prussia, Germany

Occupation businessman

Mother's full name Margot Goldberg

Birthplace Breslau, Germany

Occupation house wife

Where did you grow up ? in Breslau

Present community San Francisco

Education Gymnasium, Universities of Breslau and Berlin
State Academy for Church and School Music in Berlin

Occupation(s) Musician
Musicology
Mechanically produced old music

Special interests or activities

BAKER'S BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF MUSICIANS

Altman, Ludwig, German-American organist and composer; b. Breslau, Sept. 2, 1910. He studied at the Univ. of Breslau with Arnold Schmitz and Peter Epstein; in 1929–33 attended courses of Hans Joachim Moser, Arnold Schering, Johannes Wolf, and Friedrich Blume at the State Academy for Sacred Music in Berlin; also took private lessons in organ playing with Arthur Zubke. He remained in Berlin for three years after Hitler's advent to power, serving as organist at the Neue Synagoge, the largest Jewish synagogue still in operation (1933–36). In 1936 he emigrated to America; settled in San Francisco; in 1937 became organist and choral director at Temple Emanu-El; from 1940 to 1973 was organist of the San Francisco Symph. Orch.; from 1948 to 1965 he was also organist of the Bach Festivals in Carmel, Calif.; in 1952 he became Municipal Organist of San Francisco. In 1982 he received a doctorate *honoris causa* from the Univ. of San Francisco. He composed numerous scores of sacred music, among them *Sabbath Music* for Cantor, Choir, and Organ (1963); *The Blessing of Moses* for Baritone Solo, Choir, and Organ (1977); several psalms for Voices and Organ; and works for organ solo. He furthermore edited Beethoven's organ works, Telemann's *Suite Baroque,* pieces by Ph.E. Bach for Organ Clock, and some organ compositions by Mendelssohn. As a concert organist he appeared in solo recitals in London, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Bern, Lausanne, and Zürich, as well as in San Francisco, in programs of Baroque and Classical music with a generous inclusion of ultramodern works by contemporary composers, receiving undiluted praise in the press.

PART I

Ludwig Altman: Family and Community

Interviewed by Eleanor K. Glaser

I EARLY LIFE IN BRESLAU, GERMANY

[Interview 1: February 26, 1988]##
Interviewer: Eleanor Glaser

Parents and Relatives

Glaser: Mr. Altman, I know that you were born in Germany, in Breslau. Would you give me the date of your birth?

Altman: Gladly. It was September 2, 1910.

Glaser: And the names of your parents?

Altman: My father was Eugen, which in America is usually pronounced "Eugene," but it was E-u-g-e-n. The name of my mother was Margot, M-a-r-g-o-t.

Glaser: Did you know your grandparents?

Altman: Not the father of my mother. He died fairly young. His first name was Ludwig, and on that hangs a story right away, because there is a custom among the Jewish people that when a boy is born and his grandfather is dead, he gets the name of his dead grandfather. And so I got the name of Ludwig. If the grandfather on my father's side had died first, then my name would have been Nathan. But I must say I prefer Ludwig by far.

Glaser: What was the family name on your mother's side?

Altman: Goldberg.

This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 184.

Glaser: Did both sides of the family live in Breslau?

Altman: Yes.

Glaser: How long had the family lived in Breslau?

Altman: I don't know. I don't think terribly long. On my mother's side they came from the province of Posen and on my father's side from East Prussia. I don't know if that means anything to you, but that was roughly the region of Koenigsberg and Danzig was not too far from there. My father actually grew up in a small town, which is now in the Baltic states, called Memel.

Glaser: What did your father do for a living?

Altman: He was in business, an agent. The reason for that was a custom among the Jews at that time. My grandparents had three sons, my father was in the middle. The oldest, Arthur by name, was a musician, and curiously (as I have thought about it lately) I find that his career and activity was almost like the one I had. He was an organist; he was a choir leader. He was actually an opera conductor in Koenigsberg for a while and also a teacher of music in a girls' gymnasium or lycee. I have some of his compositions that at times I have played. They were well constructed, fine works, on the conservative side. He died, by the way, a victim in the Nazi turmoil.

The younger brother Bruno was a very talented writer for newspapers, and he unfortunately perished also. He was caught by the Nazis in France, I think. Very sad. He was a learned man, like Arthur.

The middle person, in this case my father, was always destined to go into business instead of a college education.

Glaser: Did you have brothers or sisters?

Altman: I have a sister, Vera, living in Los Angeles, who was born in June, 1919. I never remember if it was June fourth or sixth, 1919. It was after the First World War. During the First World War, my father was imprisoned by the Russians for four or five years. He was absent, and after he came back was when my sister was born. At age sixteen she went to Palestine (Hachscherare in Eyn Charod) and then came to San Francisco. Here she met and married her husband, Rabbi Elias Levi, who died last November quite unexpectedly.

Glaser: Tell me about your education.

Education

Altman: Well, I went through the regular academic course of the elite--I was selected for higher education by the school authorities. You know the system in Europe is different from ours. Ours is democratic, where everybody gets a chance to advance to his highest level. In Europe that is not so, neither in countries in front of the Iron Curtain nor in back of it. A certain percentage of the population goes to schools of higher education, and the majority through an easier schooling system which is shorter and easier, requiring less academic stuff for learning. Naturally, if you had any brains or ambitions you went to the Gymnasium.

I started in 1917 at the public schools and went all the way up to the university level. After the Matura, or final examination, you are entitled to go to a university of your choice and study anything you want. In my case it was definitely music. That was a trend that came instantly to the fore while I was growing up and thus I went from 1917 to 1933 through the entire German educational system. Just as I was beginning to write my dissertation for the doctorate, the Nazis took over Germany and my education ceased.

Glaser: Let's go back and talk about your education in Breslau.

Altman: Fine. Well, I started, in 1917, what was then called the Vorschule, which means preschool. I was just six or seven years old, and then after three years I went to the regular Gymnasium. After that I went to the University of Breslau studying musicology. At the same time I took piano lessons from excellent teachers.

Glaser: How old were you when you started your piano lessons?

Altman: About nine years old.

Glaser: Did you have a Jewish education as well as the music lessons?

Altman: Yes, and that was also different from here. In Europe you got your religious education in school. One of the rabbis would come regularly (it was like a regular school lesson) to school at certain hours and all of the religious clergy then would come at the same time and go to their respective classes. It is different over there. Here the teacher stays in one class all the time and the pupils come to his room. In Germany at that time the teachers came to you. The rabbi taught the Jewish kids and the priest and the pastor taught the Catholic and the Lutheran students.

Glaser: How many hours of that education did you have each week?

Altman: Well, it was six days a week, from about eight o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon. On Saturday it was a little shorter, let's say from eight to twelve.

Glaser: Did you have Jewish education every day?

Altman: No. The rabbis came only once or twice a week. But if you wanted to be a bar mitzvah--you know what that is?--which I was, then you had to pass an examination. You had to read from the Torah, you had to know some Hebrew, you had to know the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and things like that.

I had my bar mitzvah in 1923, a very sad period in our lives, because of the lost war. There was great poverty and awful inflation. Really, it was almost unbelievable. You know, you bought a piece of bread in the morning for a million marks. In the afternoon the same bread cost you two million marks. It was so bad that people instantly bought up anything, no matter what. I still remember that because I collected stamps at the time, and I was very much aware of inflation.

In 1923, there was all of a sudden a complete reversal, and times improved suddenly. You in the United States had a wonderful time until 1928 when you had the stock market crash. Then everything collapsed and brought in the bums like Hitler. But in 1923 there was Hjalmar Schacht, and he reversed the whole monetary system. All of a sudden a billion was one mark and we had a normal currency.

Glaser: Did he devalue the mark?

Altman: I don't know what he did; I still wouldn't understand it today. We then had good times for about five years. It was marvelous. But all over the world--here you had Hoover and Coolidge before him.

Jewish Community

Glaser: Tell me about the Jewish community in Breslau.

Altman: This was the third largest community in Germany. The figures were roughly like this: Berlin had about 172,000 and the second was Frankfurt am Main, which had about 27,000. In Breslau there were about 23,000.

Glaser: What was the total population of Breslau then?

Altman: About 650,000.

Glaser: Did Jews tend to live within one area or were they integrated within the city?

Altman: Yes, the latter. In the first place, at that time we had few private homes, and those were only for the wealthy. There were not enough of those for a whole district. Breslau Jewry was small in numbers. In Berlin, with its large Jewish population, things were different, of course.

Breslau wasn't large, and we walked. We were used to walking great distances. Also public transportation covered the entire city and was reliable.

Glaser: Did your family attend the synagogue?

Altman: No, hardly ever. I uncomfortably have to say that the one and only family member who went to temple regularly was my grandmother Lucie, my mother's mother.

That, incidentally, is the way it is in Europe today. If you go to a religious service, Jewish or Christian, you find attendance is sparse. What draws now is, curiously, religious music, particularly organ recitals. Very big. Like here, often the organist outpulls the minister attendance-wise. [laughs] Sometimes there is a conflict, and the organist has to be diplomatic, not to offend his clergy.

II MOVE TO BERLIN FOR MUSICAL EDUCATION, 1930

The State Academy for Church and School Music

Altman: My mother, particularly, was very anxious for me not to stay in Breslau because there was really nothing to look forward to after I passed the Gymnasium, the Abitur. And so, after studying three months in Breslau at the university--that's the Institute for Musicology--it was arranged that I should go to Berlin with its much larger musical field and greater opportunity. And I would study at the University of Berlin, which of course held a tremendous prestige, and at the State Academy for Church and School Music, also in Berlin, called Berlin Charlottenburg.

Have you heard of the name Charlottenburg?

Glaser: Yes, I've seen the palace.

Altman: Exactly. Then you have seen where my alma mater was.

Glaser: Is that where the school was?

Altman: Yes. You know there was a center part, and then if you went to the right that was my school, the State Academy. Not now, anymore. On the left side, you went into the chapel.

Glaser: You mean it was actually within this--do you call Charlottenburg a castle?

Altman: Schloss, yes.

Glaser: Oh, I didn't realize that was a school.

Altman: At that time, in the 1920s and '30s, yes. That's where I studied. That's where they taught all the applied musical subjects like singing, choir conducting, organ, piano, et cetera. Theory, composition. Classes were all on the level floor. The most valuable instrument was the organ in the "Koenigin Louise Kapelle," also called the "Eosander Kapelle." It housed a very famous organ built by Arp Schnitger shortly after 1700. I forget the exact date. But anyway, it was a very historically-important organ. And there the lessons took place.

Breslau had no institute for the training of music teachers in the public schools but Berlin did. I went there in January, 1929, to try to pass the entrance exams of the State Academy for Church and School Music. Fortunately, I passed and was accepted for the Fall semester of 1930.

The director of the school was Hans Joachim Moser, a fabulous musician. He knew everything about everything. With the greatest ease and rapidity he could and did write on any conceivable subject in music. His memory was proverbial. At the outset Moser told us that these would have to be on a competitive basis since there were only thirty places open for which over 160 had applied. The exams were to be taken on three consecutive days at the end of which the winners were to be announced. We were to be tested in organ and piano playing, in music history and theory, modulation, in ear training and dictation in realizing a figured bass, important in Bach playing, and so on. I must have done well in all of this, to compensate in part for my bad singing.

With some amusement I remember how the vocal teacher to whom I was assigned always tried to ditch me when the new semester came around, considering me a hopeless case vocally. Since I liked and wished to stay with her, I asked her once why she singled me out as the one she wanted to drop out of her class. She, wanting to spare my feelings, gave as her excuse that my name came up first, beginning with an "A." I had nerve enough to point out that she might very well start the alphabet from the other end, instead of the "A", to keep me as her student.

To go back to the entrance exams: each and every one of the 160 applicants was interviewed by Moser, who wanted to get a general idea of the students' mentality, background, and intelligence.

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday the entrance examination took place. Late on Saturday Director Moser appeared, complimented us for the generally high level of scoring, regretted that only a small percentage could be admitted and then read the names of the

Altman: lucky ones. As it happened there was another fellow by the same name as mine and you can imagine how rutschy (anxious) I was until the end when I rushed up to Moser asking which Altman was the chosen one. Rutschy, by the way, I made up. [laughs]

The Academy was concerned primarily with the practical aspects of music, like how to teach classes, how to teach a community a new song or a choral piece. The instruction included advanced organ, cembalo, piano, voice training, counterpoint, some composing, a great deal of realisation of the so-called "Figured Bass"; quite a melange as you can see.

Glaser: Where did the university come in?

Altman: That was well coordinated time-wise. The famous University of Berlin was Unter den Linden, easily reached by the so-called Ringbahn (elevated train). There we got to study music history, and all of the scholarly apparatus for deciphering old music with all its various notational systems.

Living Arrangements

Glaser: How did you go about finding yourself a place to live while you were in school in Berlin?

Altman: Luckily, that was no problem because I had lots of relatives in Berlin. My grandmother, to give you right away an idea, from my mother's side was number seventeen of eighteen children. So you can imagine there were quite a few of her brothers and sisters in Berlin, and I always had a free meal (so-called Mittagbrot) on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. My Aunt Rosa invited me for every Friday and Sunday and my Aunt Johanna for every Saturday.

Glaser: Did you live with one of them?

Altman: No, that I didn't do. I had always a rented room. In Germany they call it a Moebliertes Zimmer, a furnished room with breakfast. It didn't have a private bath. There were always very funny characters with whom one lived. I lived first with a Herr Cohen in a home where everybody was a little bit crazy. The Jewish word is mishuga. [laughs] But Mr. Cohen had a piano, and that was very important to me. I could only stay with a landlord who had a piano on which I was permitted to play at any time. I had that with Herr Cohen. He was such a fine human being whom I remember with

Altman: affection. He went the way of so many Jews, he and his lady friend. I can still see him, a little guy, who told the funniest jokes and stories. The poor devil, he also went like the others.

Glaser: Was this in the Charlottenburg area?

Altman: Yes.

Glaser: Did your parents have any financial difficulty in sending you to the university?

Altman: Yes. Actually, I could not depend on them for monetary support. They were not in a position to do this. Don't forget that these were the Depression years.

Glaser: How did you finance your education?

Altman: I was always lucky. It is a strange thing to say, but I was poor for so many years, yet I always had enough money. I know it is a contradiction.

Glaser: Did you work while going to school? Did you have time for that?

Altman: Yes. Oh, there was nothing I could not do. I could go from morning 'till night every day. I gave piano lessons; I gave theory lessons; I accompanied singers, various kinds. I had unbelievable lucky breaks.

Work and Study

Altman: Professor Gatz conducted the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra four or five times a season in his capacity as the Director of the Bruckner Society of Berlin. This was an important organization of special appeal to Bruckner lovers and to Austrians living in Berlin in exile, if you want to call it that. Outside of Bruckner, whose music was not yet fully appreciated, the programs featured other composers, like Richard Strauss, early Schönberg, et cetera.

Repeatedly there were parts for celesta or harmonium in one or two selections, not enough to hire a player who would have to be paid full time. And so Professor Felix Gatz asked me if I wanted to do these parts. Would I? Imagine, sitting on the stage of the Berlin Philharmonic Hall, along with all these world-renowned musicians! I remember especially the "Ariadne auf Naxos" excerpts which has an important harmonium part and some music by one Joseph Marx, not too well known outside his native Vienna.

Altman: I got to play on the organ or on the harmonium in Berlin's Philharmonic Hall just the few times under Gatz, plus in September 1934, when I played for the Jüdische Gemeinde services. By the way, Professor Gatz left Germany in time, 1934, settling in New Jersey where he became a professor at Duquesne University. His specialty was Music Aesthetics, and he wanted me during our Berlin days to write my dissertation on some old French treatise of then unknown origin. I should also have mentioned that I got to know Professor Gatz through a strong recommendation of a mutual musical friend in Breslau. Gatz then heard me perform and evidently liked what he heard.

So here I was at nineteen or twenty to go as the emissary of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra to where the harmoniums were rented. I never liked the instrument, but to sit in Berlin Philharmonic Hall with that orchestra, it was just unbelievable; it was just fabulous. I had to pick the harmonium at an agency, and you can imagine that when I appeared there, practically a kid, they would all kowtow to me because I was sent from the Berlin Philharmonic, the orchestra of Fürtwangler.

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Glaser: How could you afford the expensive cultural events of Berlin?

Altman: Studying at the Academy of Church and School Music, we had a small loge at the second level of the State Opera, right over the orchestra pit, and every Monday morning we could buy the tickets for eighteen pfennigs. And there, right in front, would always be Ludwig Altman to buy tickets. I heard everything at the State Opera Unter den Linden for that amount. And I would constantly attend Berlin Philharmonic Hall concerts. I would always have standing room because it was the cheapest. As soon as the doors would open we would all sprint to rush to the front where we had good standing space. Oh, I still see myself. Then we would watch to see if some seat was unoccupied, and after intermission we would sneak up to that seat and sit down. We would always run up on the left side to get standing room where we could watch the orchestra and the conductor. That meant more than the convenience of sitting.

Glaser: There was a great deal going on culturally in Berlin in those years.

Altman: Oh, yes. Berlin at that time was the mecca of music; there was no doubt about that. I could show you some of those books I have about the cultural life of Berlin. There was never anything like it. Maybe London and New York, possibly.

Glaser: This was still under the Weimar Republic?

Altman: Absolutely. As soon as that was over the Nazis came in and the "happy days" were over.

Glaser: Wasn't Berlin always considered a bohemian city?

Altman: Munich more in that line.

Music on German Radio

Glaser: Tell me more about the relationship of the students and professors at the Academy.

Altman: Well, I had no problems on that score, since I am by nature easy going, and respectful towards others. When Hitler got in at the beginning of 1933 and I had to leave the Academy and the University, I asked for a statement from my various teachers and they invariably commented on my good character, disposition and "modesty." When, four years later, I left Germany altogether I received similar statements from my Jewish employers, the Jüdische Gemeinde and the C.V. Zeitung. Combine all this with my work as a talented musician and you got the proverbial "good boy."

I got along with them all, Director Moser and my teachers. One of them especially who had a personal connection to the big shots of the Berlin Radio complex on Masuren Allee. He gave lectures on musical themes frequently and he used me as pianist for playing the musical illustrations. This was a godsend for me at the time because my other musical and financial rewards were not great. In our U.S. also radio work is sparse, not always featuring the finest fare, nor is it secure. We have no "live" performances except occasionally and mostly in New York.

How different, how very, very different things were and are in Europe! There the radio station might be compared to a cultural center. The government runs the complex, financed through a monthly fee of a few Marks for every outlet you have purchased. Larger countries like France, Germany, Italy, et cetera are divided into so many radio and now also TV districts and these districts are then reasonably independent on their own, financed as they are through this collection of money which depends on the number of radios and now also of TV, which the individual household may have.

West Germany, for example, has about a dozen such districts and these are so affluent that each one maintains a full strength symphony orchestra, a large professional chorus, able to sight read the most modern atonal scores, a theatrical ensemble, recitators, lecturers, et cetera, et cetera. There are funds available to engage outside artists freely.

Glaser: Then there should be a greater desire to be connected with such a vital organization?

Altman: Indeed there was and is and I dwelled on the subject in order to give the general background which affected so many others along myself. So this professor getting me jobs on the radio fulfilled ambitions and needs. The competition for radio engagements was always fierce even among the most prominent musicians and artists. Characteristically, it was one of Hitler's first acts to kick all Jews out of all radio work. Verboten!

If you had a chance to pick employment between the Berlin Philharmonic and the radio orchestra called the Rias and if you were after glory, you would choose to become a member of the Berlin Philharmonic. But if you were more interested in out-of-the-way things you like to perform, and even getting more money, then the Rias would be your choice. I just mention that in order to make it plain how that works. I don't know how many districts West Germany is divided into; it's around eight or nine or ten, but you can see how the system is different.

In order to give this, my oral history, some further depth let me compare the European with the American system.

The American one is limited by contrast. It's run by and through private enterprise, mostly as a part of various networks, occasionally on a local basis. Support of some kind is given to so-called public service stations like in San Francisco to our station KKHI or Channel Nine. We have numberless stations it seems, by necessity small because of their very numberlessness. Live presentations are rare as are outside live performances.

In Europe the radio as well as the TV are government run; there is no competition, exceptions being the BBC in London and some others. The fact that the broadcasters do not have to spend any amount on competing with each other and can collect vast sums of money by taxing the consumer for having his radio(s) makes it possible to establish veritable cultural centers. The total income is divided on a percentage basis between the various departments like music, drama, entertainment, lectures, you name it.

To stick to our concern, music, there we have subdivisions: a full-fledged symphony orchestra with its own conductor, chamber music ensembles, dance orchestras. Add further vocal ensembles, superb choruses of all sizes and numbers. These stations can afford to mount whole operas using their own musical resources only.

Glaser: After Hitler you were asked to play for the German radio?

Altman: Yes, in 1964. My wife and I were officially invited by the Bonn Government to come and I was engaged to play organ recitals in various churches, the most prestigious one being the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche in Berlin. A picture of this church is in every picture book of Berlin, usually on the front page. I am sure you have seen it. The ruins were left standing as an everlasting memorial. My recital was advertised all over town, full program of Bach, American music and Mendelssohn. The reception was moving for Emmy and myself. Four of my old teachers came, including Professor Moser and the entire press sent their music critics, about ten, who had favorable things to say. The church was completely full and they ran out of programs. What a day!

On the same visit I was asked by the Berlin Radio (RIAS) to prepare a lecture on any subject of my choice. I decided to speak on "Life of a local organist in the United States." I wanted to bring out the difference between the fortunes of the so-called stars with the circumstances of a more or less typical average musician, using my own specialty as an organist as the starting point. I had to turn in my paper some two or three months in advance. In arriving at the station I was on easy street, indeed. I did not have to read my essay myself if I did not want to. They have several people there whose only job was to read the various lectures accepted for being broadcast. Even the pay schedule was special, one-half of the fee paid with no deductions upon acceptance, the other half at the time of the broadcast.

Glaser: Could one draw any conclusions from your talk?

Altman: I hope one could. It has been my contention for quite a few years that our musical standards in the U.S. have risen to such a degree that in performance at all levels, in research and organization we are ahead of the class even on the international scene, except in opera.

The dearth of repertoire in composition is unfortunately a universal malaise. Where are the great composers?

A Music Critic

Glaser: Outside Jewish liturgical music, did you have any other musical ambitions?

Altman: Yes. Here I have to interject something of more general interest, namely the situation of a music critic in Germany as compared with one in the United States. In Germany and other countries in Europe, the large newspapers and magazines employ quite a few writers but only on a part-time basis. Your editor would send you to such or such an event, tell you about how many lines you were to provide, and your fee depended on the number of lines you would deliver. Like so many other things in life you have to take this information with a grain of salt. You can imagine how disappointed and surprised I was when I visited our fine local music critics, Mr. Frankenstein and Mr. Fried, who told me that they were on full time assignment but that there was no provision for outsiders to have their work published or paid for.

Glaser: How did you get started as a music critic in Germany?

Altman: I got the idea to utilize the central location of my big and culturally important city, Berlin, to try to become a correspondent for the out-of-town press. Among many other subjects to write about I thought that a survey of a season's activity would always be of interest. This would not make for a grandiose income but could be a way of one's platschchke through life.

Glaser: Platschchke through life?

Altman: Yes, I made it up. [laughs]

Finally, I succeeded in getting into personal contact with the man at the helm of the department of the out-of-town press. If memory is correct, it was Hans Goslar. His territory was the State of Prussia.

Glaser: Could you use one article for many different places?

Altman: Not exactly, no. But one could write up several versions of the same event. Times have changed and today the systems are much more alike, the European and the American workings in the newspaper world. Take as an example the situation at the San Francisco Chronicle: three musicians are supposed to cover the cultural field, namely music, dance, and related things, plus articles on basic problems and reviews of records, books, et cetera. But the magnitude of range and quantity of material is so overwhelming that outside correspondents are used all over the place.

The three local musicians referred to are, of course, Mr. Robert Commanday, who is like a senior critic and who has been a great help to me (and many, many others) in following my musical interests and reviewing my recitals so consistently. Of Joshua Kosman I heard, or rather read, first when I read in Cum Notis Variorum that he is working on his dissertation. If so, then he has undertaken an heroic ordeal since a doctorate from the Music

Altman: Department at Cal in Berkeley is hard to get. To round out the trio, Marilyn Tucker has added through versatility and an often sunny disposition. I don't think that she has ever reviewed a concert of mine, this was always territory for Bob Commanday or Mr. Tircuit, who also liked my programs with all their novelties: Schoenberg, Cage, Stockhausen, Copland, Aribert Reimann, Poulenc, et cetera.

I sincerely believe, nay, I am convinced that Europeans have the wrong idea in judging through comparing our and their financial and cultural strengths. We are not as rich as we and they think we are, but culturally we are rich indeed. Also I am convinced we are more culturally advanced today than the Europeans are.

Glaser: How long did you continue as a music critic? Was this all during your university years?

Altman: Yes, it was. What triggered the whole thing was that there was an article in the best musical journal with which I disagreed, and so I sent my comment to the editor in which I took issue with yet another contribution they had published. I think it was on the treatment of dissonance in "old music." I am anxious to bring up the subject of the comparative ease of being a free-lancer in everything cultural--even in times of Depression. The need for new and provocative material was so large. I was still going to school then; I was not even out of high school--I was maybe eighteen or nineteen years old--and my article was instantly accepted and printed.

I should have mentioned that the European dailies, weeklies, et cetera, had a special name for all non-political, non-commercial articles: Feuilleton. It was called "Feuilleton unter den stricht." It was beneath the line. There was a strong line, and beneath it was this entertainment section of the newspapers. It had to be replenished constantly because they consumed such vast numbers of things, like poetry, stories to be continued.

Glaser: This was an entertainment supplement to the newspaper?

Altman: You could call it that. And it is still so today. I remember what Mr. Fried said to me: "Even if I could use your articles, because I like them, I could never pay you anything because there is no budget for that." There is over there, and while it's small by comparison it exists.

Glaser: That was a very nice way for you to supplement your earnings from your other activities.

Altman: Yes. Ultimately it was my craving for any expression, participation, and outlet which mattered, from childhood 'till today, as long as it was in music.

Altman: Luckily owners and editors liked my work well enough to use me as a reviewer. With some regularity they would mail me books, scores, et cetera, to review always with suggesting the number of lines desired.

The main Berlin newspaper was the Berlin Tageblatt. The main music critic was Alfred Einstein; he was a musicologist of the first order. He wrote a three-volume book on the madrigal. His Mozart biography is considered a classic, as is his edition of Köchel's catalogue of the works of Mozart. Add to this Einstein's edition of Musik lexikon of Riemann you get an idea of the immense scope of his contribution.

And by no means was Einstein the only German-Jewish musician reflecting honor, distinction, and glory on the country of his birth. There was Fritz Stieds of the City Opera of Berlin, Otto Klemperer, Bruno Walter, Joseph Rosenstock, William Steinberg and many others. We speak with horror of the atrocities of the Nazi bums; we should not forget the idiocy in depriving themselves of many of Germany's finest citizens. All these wonderful men had to leave at the risk of their lives, with nothing but what they could carry, plus ten dollars, the sum a grateful German nation allowed them to take out. How did these musicians reestablish their careers?

The Political Climate

Glaser: When you were in Berlin, things were not only in cultural ferment, but also politically. Would you tell me about that?

Altman: Yes; it would also give the general background of and the situation of the Berlin Jews. The danger in talking about it is that I have to generalize too greatly, so what I am remembering has to be accepted with the proverbial grain of salt. The Germans have the reputation of being law-abiding and to love to obey clear, simple orders. In my personal experience I found that anti-Semitism has to be ordered and consistently nourished by orders from a top hierarchy to be effective in persecuting Jews. Up to the moment that Hitler was given total power, the general situation and outlook was bad, bad but not hopeless. Hindsight, as former President Truman told us, is easy, as it is easy to criticize the leaders of Berlin Jewry for waiting too long before urgently urging us to leave the country.

I have always liked to describe the first years of the Nazi regime by comparing them with an avalanche: an avalanche can be stopped in its beginning. The later this is done, the harder it gets and after a certain point, stopping is altogether impossible.

Altman: An even better comparison: cancer--the earlier detection the more successful treatment--later detection, less effective, less chance of success, occasional remission (fool's paradise), terminal.

To come back to Alfred Einstein as the prototype for so many outstanding emigrés: Born in 1880, from 1927-33 in Berlin, leaving for several other European countries, finally deciding to move to the U.S.A., arriving in New York in January 1939. No money, no job, but his musical excellence and his reputation and references get him a professorship at Smith College in August 1939. He rises quickly as lecturer for Yale, Princeton, you name it. U.C. Berkeley invites him to give lectures for the summer of 1950. Coming by car, he has a heart attack in Oklahoma City, which nails him down for two months. Finally arriving in Berkeley, he settled in El Cerrito where he died in 1953.

In Germany the stupidity, cruelty, isolating non-Aryans (Jews) from Aryans went on. I mention silly new regulations: If a Jewish household employed an Aryan female, that person had to be forty-five years old or older, so that no Jew would lust after her. Or the edict that a non-Aryan could no longer sit on a park bench, or later one could not use public transportation or had to wear a yellow star with the identifying Jude (Jew) visible.

Luckily I was spared these indignities since I left Germany around December 25, 1936. As I announced my leaving, several of these Jewish leaders warned me, predicting that I would not find work in the U.S.A., where I was unknown. Eliezer Ehrenreich, the authority in placing and hiring rabbis, cantors, choir personnel and organists, liked my work and was the one who put me on the organ of the Neue Synagogue on Oranienburger Strasse during my last year in Berlin. When I went up to his office, telling him that I was leaving the country, he told me that this very afternoon the board of directors of the Judische Gemeinde was meeting and that on the agenda was to appoint me permanent organist of the Neue Synagogue for life. Did I under those conditions still want to leave? I stood there, realizing that this was a Sternstueck (turning point) in my life, a decision of greatest consequence. Silently I asked myself if I could visualize my playing the organ thirty years hence. As I could not see this likely, I thought that it was better to leave while I was young (twenty-six). I thanked Mr. Ehrenreich sincerely and will always remember him. He was murdered in Ravensbruck.

Now, by and large the Berliners were not the worst among the Nazi people. There was the very fresh and refreshing dialect--a very prosaic people. Of course, to generalize is always superficial and misleading. But, by and large, I think we can generalize a little. Therefore, Hitler had it harder in Berlin than in many other places of the country. I personally was never

Altman: attacked in Berlin and I lived four years there. I was supposedly not Jewishly looking, if there is any such foolish thing. So I went through town unbothered, I would almost say.

In the beginning, there was another strange trait among the German people. They are so law-abiding that they do also the bad things only if they are told to do so. In those first four years, whenever Hitler shut up for a while, the Germans instantly reverted again to be together with the Jews. They would go to the Jewish doctors, maybe go the back steps or after it got dark. But they would go. There would be such a rapprochement that Hitler or Goebbels (who was then the worst) would have to start a new campaign to alienate the Jews from the Germans and the Germans from the Jews.

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Glaser: You were saying that you had Mittagbrot with two of your aunts.

Altman: Yes. We called that midday bread. One aunt was Tante Rosa Jacobsohn, and one was Tante Johanna, who was the youngest sister of my grandmother. She was number eighteen and my grandmother was number seventeen. [pauses to get a book from shelf inscribed in German, "To my dear nephew, Rosa Jacobsohn, 1927"]

Glaser: Did the two women live together?

Altman: No. Tante Johanna was by far more affluent than Tante Rosa, and there was actually almost enmity between the two. That was an unfortunate characteristic of families in Europe: that they don't care for each other and criticize each other.

Glaser: Tell me more about what was happening in politics in the 1930s.

Altman: Well, the most startling thing happened in 1932. I wish that what I'm saying now would become a little more known and become a little accepted, because it is of great, great importance, in my opinion, in the evaluation of the time which brought Hitler to the fore. In 1932, the Hitler party, the National Socialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (terrible name) was on the downgrade. What happened was that the Nazis in the twenties created a lot of noise and fighting spirit. But they were not really successful because they never accomplished anything. They cost a great deal of money, which came from the industry, particularly the war industry of Germany, who were always scared of the Bolsheviks--the Russians. They thought to use Hitler to antagonize the Communists enough and do away with the threat from the Communists in Germany--there were quite a few. I think about six million voted Communist and were in the Communist Party.

Altman: The Reichstag, which is the same as our Congress, needed 60,000 votes to get one candidate into the Reichstag. But they finally thought less and less of Hitler because nothing happened. In 1932 it showed for the first time that the Nazis, who had gradually gained numbers in the Reichstag through the various times they had to vote, had less votes than the time before. In other words, the fear of the Nazis being invincible evaporated in 1932.

To give you a personal example, which could be generalized I'm sure: the European manner is to have your newspaper, all pages, displayed on the streets. There was a box there with glass in the front, and the people used to stand there and read the paper so they wouldn't have to buy it. And there were the terrible Nazi, anti-Semitic papers, dreadful, and they would admire what the Nazis had to say, because they were going up all the time in membership and prominence.

But in 1932, that reversed. That was the time when I would go around the streets of Berlin, stand with the people there, and I would make derogatory remarks about the Nazis. I would say, "Oh, Herr Hitler, he is a stupid ass. He is now done in. Because once it starts going down there is no way of telling how far down it will be." And that was accepted. People didn't kill me, or attack me. I could not have dared to say that a year earlier.

It is absolutely correct that Hitler did not have to become the chancellor and eventually the all-powerful dictator. He could have been avoided, and very few people adhere to that story. I am one of those, but the overwhelming majority will violently disagree. They will say, "No, but he had to come." But it is not so.

My general opinion about politics is that an immense amount is not premeditated. It is happenstance that could have just as well turned the other way. What the Nazis did against the Jewish people in general, all those horrible things, they did always under orders. It wasn't like as if a single Nazi in seeing a Jewish person on the street would automatically beat him up. That was not the way it happened. Even the worst atrocities were committed by order. Hence the endless sequence of regulations, Verbote and Gebote, all aimed to isolate and strangulate us.

When Hitler came to power on January 30 of 1933, I was at a concert of the Berlin Philharmonic with Otto Klemperer conducting, and when I returned by elevated train to where I lived I heard uncontrolled yelling. It just came over the radio that Hitler had been empowered by the President of the Republic, Paul von Hindenburg, to lead the country as its chancellor. By the way, Hindenburg was a decent man, only so old that he didn't know from straight up anymore. He detested Hitler, who was only a corporal in the First World War, and not a nobleman. The pressure to

Altman: appoint Hitler top ruler came from Hindenburg's son and from Franz von Papen, the vice-president, and the state secretary by the name of Meissner. A Mr. Meissner from the cabinet also influenced Hindenburg to call on Hitler.

So the old man fell for that scheme, and on January 30, 1933, Hitler became chancellor and was sworn to the constitution of the Weimar Republic, which by the way is a masterpiece. There was a big ceremony. You know Hitler was a Catholic. My theory is and always was that we could have been spared the whole agony. The whole world could have been spared all the agony if only it wasn't for that foolish, stupid action.

Glaser: What was the impact of Hitler's rise on your university studies?

Altman: Oh, I didn't finish it. I was kicked out, and they used the tactic--I passed part of my final examination in '33 in Germanistic, meaning in German languages. I passed it magna cum laude, and the reason was that I knew the subject quite well, and the professor who examined me was a decent man. There were many decent Germans at that time, and in order to make it better for me, he had me come to his home. I can still see myself sitting on a beautiful balcony, where nobody bothered me, and I took the examination. The name of the professor is Huebner.

As I mentioned before, in Germany all was done Gebot (commandment) or Verbot (prohibition), so also here in my small case. Legally one had to re-register before a deadline. I, with many others, could not do so because the Nazi bureaucrats deliberately did not return my registration folder.

Glaser: And that caused you to be expelled from school? You could not re-register for the next semester?

Altman: You are right.

III MORE ON BRESLAU

[Interview 2: April 11, 1988]##

Family and Relatives

Glaser: We need to have more information, Mr. Altman, on your early life in Breslau. You mentioned that your father was an agent, but you didn't go into any details about what he did.

Altman: Well, my life in Breslau, where I was born September 2, 1910, was actually also not a very easy life. It was a time when the old empire of Germany was put to the test, or put itself to the test, in the first World War which began in 1914. And it actually was the introduction to very many very unhappy experiences in Europe and, perhaps, in the whole world. And our lives, like the lives of everybody else in Germany, were also disturbed and not altogether happy. So when I look back to Breslau, it is always with a certain aura, a certain feeling, of something that was rather sad and not very progressive and not particularly bright and light.

My father was an agent in textiles, particularly--"Pumpchen, [calls his wife], what is called Hampf? What is it in German?"

Mrs. Altman: Hemp.

Altman: Yes, he was a buyer of hemp in Russia, and sold it in Germany. I don't know any details or any particulars, but that is what I remember.

Glaser: Does that mean that he was away from home a great deal, traveling?

Altman: Yes. Particularly in 1914. He was in Russia buying hemp, and when the war broke out he was caught in Russia and was kept there as a civil prisoner for about four years until 1918. And as soon as the war ended, he came home, strangely enough on my birthday. He had the idea and the great wish to be home on September second because

Altman: of the birthday of mine--the eighth birthday--and he achieved that. So it was a rather happy coincidence. Unfortunately, the general picture was not as joyful. The end of the war found Austria and Germany truncated. The province of Silesia, for instance, of which Breslau was the capitol, was turned over to Poland in part. Before the partition it was rather prosperous because of its central location in Europe. Austria suffered even more.

Glaser: Wasn't it important because it was at the confluence of two rivers?

Altman: Actually, yes. The main river of Breslau was the Oder, a very wide stream with a very strong current. But you know, I was such a good swimmer at the time that I swam across the Oder quite frequently. It had a very nice promenade going to a place called Wilhelmshafen, and it was a very pleasant town.

Glaser: We didn't talk at all about the education of your parents. Had they gone to a Gymnasium?

Altman: My father was not given the chance to go to a university. I don't even know if he made the Abitur (graduation). I have a notion he did not. He went into a commercial life for which he was not particularly gifted. I always felt he would have done much better if he would have been an employee, let's say, at the railroads or a teacher. I imagine certain professions and activities were closed to the Jewish people. And he had some problems on that score as an agent. You know, a much better activity would have been the academic field or employment by a government agency or something like that. He was more that type.

Glaser: By whom was he employed as an agent?

Altman: No, he had connections with factories, you see?

Glaser: Oh, he was self-employed as an agent?

Altman: Yes.

Glaser: I see. He was a middleman who went to buy the hemp.

Altman: Yes, exactly.

Glaser: We didn't talk about your mother at all in our first interview.

Altman: Yes. Well, she came from an excellent family. I mean outstanding. Basically, they were in the banking business--very high-class Jewish bankers. They were mostly living in Karlsruhe, which is in Baden. It was a very large family, and the great man in that branch of the family was Moses Goldberg. Everybody looked up to

Altman: him as the family's patriarch. My mother belonged to that family--I think through her mother, my grandmother, whose first name was Lucie.

Glaser: Lucie Goldberg?

Altman: Yes, whom I loved dearly and of whom I can hardly think that she had to end the way she had to end--that she was taken to a concentration camp. She had a terrible end, and I can never forget it. I remember the many Sunday morning visits; she always prided herself for the confidences I opened up to her. There was always the Malaga wine and a special kind of chocolate cookie she knew I loved.

Glaser: Was she the only grandparent you knew?

Altman: No. I knew both my father's father and mother, but only slightly. I don't know why. I don't really remember much about them.

Glaser: You had more to do with your mother's parents than with your father's parents?

Altman: With my mother's mother. My mother's father died very young from diabetes, which at that time could not be controlled.

Glaser: Did your mother have brothers or sisters?

Altman: No. She was the only one.

Glaser: What sort of education did she have?

Altman: I don't remember that too well, either; I don't think she spoke about that very much. But she went to the--they called it Lyceum, I think. She never did much with it.

Glaser: She was a housewife?

Altman: Yes.

Glaser: Did you live in an apartment?

Altman: Yes. I remember on the ground floor there was a man who had the nobility title. And then there was, of course, a Portier, which was what they called--

Glaser: Concierge?

Altman: Yes. I believe there were six apartments in the house. We had the second floor, the one on the left side.

Glaser: How large was it?

Altman: Well, the ceilings were very much higher than here; you know that. And the rooms were also bigger. It had only one bathroom for the whole apartment. And it was ice-cold in winter; when your heater was off the old way, you know. One room, maybe, was heated.

Glaser: You had those big tile stoves, a Kacheloven?

Altman: Yes. And during the war, while my father was away, I remember that my grandmother moved in with us, and we had always other people who just rented a room. That was very common. So all these people together had one bathroom, unheated; nobody thought anything about it.

Glaser: Did you have servants?

Altman: Yes, she earned about five dollars a month.

Glaser: Did she live with you?

Altman: Yes, but don't ask how. [laughter] Servants didn't have a very good life. She did the cleaning and laundry, and she was there the whole time. Probably every second Sunday she had the afternoon off. It was the old-fashioned, patriarchal system. It was not very attractive to be a housemaid.

Glaser: Were your parents strict with you and your sister Vera?

Altman: No, I don't think so. In the first place, we were both very easy. And with me it was right away the interest in music. No. I don't think I had any possible reason to be unhappy.

Glaser: What sort of activities did you do with your parents?

Altman: None.

Glaser: No? Did you go on outings?

Altman: Oh, I see. Very rarely. Maybe we did, but I don't remember any particular ones. Maybe summer vacations, you know.

Glaser: On the weekend, did parents do things with their children at that time?

Altman: No. But you went with your own classmates.

Glaser: Was your parents' social life mostly with your father's brothers, or was their social life more with friends?

Altman: The latter. My father's brothers were not in Breslau. My father came from East Prussia. That is the very top of the most eastern and northern part of Germany at that time. Today it is Poland

again. Well, not again, but it is Polish today. My uncle Arthur, in any case, stayed in East Prussia. He was a musician there, as we mentioned, and he came down to the Silesian mountains, usually during the summer. Once or twice, maybe twice, I went there to meet him. This was heaven for me in that I could talk about music with my uncle and did that at great lengths. He was very encouraging, and he even gave me some scores of his. I have quite a few of his right here. [points to bookshelf] These are all orchestral scores. He, by the way, was also an organist in Königsberg, as I mentioned, and played in a church, the court church. You know why it is called the court church?

Glaser: No.

Altman: The ruler's church.

Glaser: But you didn't have a king any longer.

Altman: He was a generation older than I am, you know. He started there already around 1900.

Glaser: But the Kaiser was in Berlin, wasn't he, rather than in Königsberg?

Altman: Yes, but he could still have a court church there. It was just the name of it.

My uncle was married and his wife objected that he talked about music so much with me. He was supposed to rest. And from a certain moment on, she said, "Now you have talked enough about music. No more." And then he would stop. And I was mad.

Glaser: Of course. How old were you at that time?

Altman: Maybe fifteen.

Glaser: It must have been wonderful to have an uncle with whom you could share this great interest.

Altman: Yes, but it was very sporadic. But whenever it came, I was always delighted. He also perished--I don't know how. He was quite a tall, handsome man.

Actually, in physique, outlook on life, and character, I take much more after my mother's side. Despite my affection for Uncle Arthur, I felt much more akin to my mother's family.

Glaser: You preferred your mother's side of the family?

Altman: Definitely, yes.

Musical Experiences

Glaser: You said that you didn't have very many activities with your parents, but you did things with your chums, with your friends. What sorts of things did you do?

Altman: Mostly talking about music. Sounds strange, doesn't it? But that's what it was. The interest in music was so pronounced in Breslau particularly--so much was offered. We had an opera house which played only opera for eleven months a year. There was a special theatre just for light opera--Operette, it's called--for the same eleven months. Then there was a separate orchestra, with a very poor conductor; but he kept his job because in Germany everybody working for a musical institution kept his job. You know, you never let anybody go because he was no good anymore. You kept him on anyway. And chamber music was immense and solo recitals, one after another. And many--particularly Jewish people--professional or business people or whatever, had chamber music every week in their homes. That was a source of great enjoyment, and I fully participated in that, starting when I was still very young.

There are all kinds of funny stories which could be told, and maybe this is the moment to do so. I looked very young, and that gave me a bad time because I figured that the older people wouldn't take to me because they didn't want to talk much with a child. So, I made up that whenever I went to somebody with something musical, I would pretend that my father sent this through me, his son. Really crazy.

When I was eighteen years old, I composed an orchestral piece with the title, "Funeral March." It was very much beholden to the music of Anton Bruckner who at that time played a great role in my musical life. The orchestra leader, who agreed to run it through at least at a rehearsal of his orchestra, which was the orchestra of the mail carriers of Breslau--[laughter]. They practiced every Monday in some god-forsaken hall. I gave them the score, and I had written out all the parts--I still have the stuff here--for the individual players. They had no duplicating machines at that time. So every Monday was a chance to hear that piece played.

I was very unfortunate because one Monday the first oboe wouldn't come--he broke his leg. The next Monday the concert master had a cold. And so on and so forth. But finally we did hit it right. And I remember it very well how I was in seventh heaven to hear my music played by an orchestra. Afterwards, when it was over the conductor took the music back. Then after a week or two I went up to collect my music and said, "My father is very grateful that you did this for him and we all appreciate it very much," and marched off. I never told him what I had done. [laughter]

Glaser: They didn't know it was your music? They thought it was your father's?

Altman: [laughing] I don't know, but nobody said anything. And my own father didn't even know it.

And another occasion that I remember was when I had an interest in Esperanto. It was very popular in Germany at that time. I belonged there to a group. The basic motive of the activity was to get postage stamps for nothing. You see, you would start to correspond in Esperanto with a guy, say, from Finland or Italy or wherever, and he would send you postage stamps, maybe twenty-five, without any charge because you sent him your German ones, which cost us nothing. To save the money and also to promote the case of Esperanto, we did that. But one man I remember--from either Finland or Yugoslavia--sent me his picture stating that he would like to have my picture in return. He was interested to know what kind of a guy I was. There I was in trouble because I didn't want him to know that I was so terribly young. So I sent him my father's picture. So that's some of the things. That gives you, maybe, a little bit of an idea of how life was in Breslau at that time.

Glaser: Yes.

Mr. Altman's Written Thoughts

Relatives##

Altman: I have written some thoughts giving more of the background in Breslau. [He reads from his notes]

Now, I would say that my mother was the only child. My grandmother was number seventeen--imagine--of eighteen children born to the Abt family. My grandmother Lucie--that's her first name--married Ludwig Goldberg. And Ludwig was, to the best of my knowledge, an agent in glass and he traveled quite a bit. Unfortunately, he was ill--he had diabetes--and at that time there was no medication. He did not even observe the rules at that time of very strict dieting. As a matter of fact, he belittled that; and the illness eventually caught up with him. He was unusually, by the way, fond of sweets. He died fairly suddenly, it seems, while on a business trip. That was in 1898, possibly in Karlsruhe or around there. Incidentally, I was named after him. It was a custom of the Jewish people to name a new baby by the name of somebody in the family who had died before. So that way I got the name Ludwig.

Altman: Ludwig Goldberg had a brother, Moses Goldberg, who was a big shot evidently, in the banking business, in the financial world. Moses Goldberg, in a way, took over. When there was a problem in the family--personal, financial--one went to Uncle Moe and he took care of the situation. He was like a patriarch. He must have been a marvelous, marvelous man. He helped my mother and my grandmother after Ludwig Goldberg had died.

At first, the glass business was taken over by my grandmother who was a wonderful, wonderful person. And later on she got support from the family, particularly in the World War I years: 1914-1918.

So, this is rather vaguely remembered because I was so young. I heard little and rarely about the whole thing, but that is as much as I can remember. I was, after all, only four years old when the war broke out. And during this time I was brought up by my mother and by my grandmother.

German School System

Altman: I still remember entering the German school system in 1917 in the midst of the war. After three years in the so-called Vorschule, I entered this Gymnasium. May I say a word about the educational system at that time, since it may not be known to everybody? The Gymnasium--higher education--was reserved for, you can almost call it, the elite, which represented of the general population roughly fifteen to twenty percent at most. And that led to the Abitur. That was the dreaded final examination which you had to pass in order to be admitted to study any subject at any university or special school of higher education. In the Gymnasium, I was a miserable student and seemingly completely unable to master the tons of learning. That was borne out by my final scoring in the Abitur: nothing but Genügends. Genügend is the same as a "C." Subject after subject I had a "C" and only once a very good, an "A," and that was in music, of course.

Now I would like to say a word about the school system of Germany in relationship to one's personal life. I have often wondered and discussed the question of the superiority or inferiority of the German school system as, for instance, compared to the American with my beloved wife, who was a school teacher all her life--with great success by the way. She was absolutely first-class and now retired. Is the American educational system better or worse than the German one, which is actually also the European one? And it's still in force in Europe, with some deviations and some concessions made, so it is a little more like ours, but basically still the old type.

Altman: Now generalizing, of course, is always unsatisfactory because it takes no cognizance of the many holes in the fabric, yet certain conclusions can be drawn still. I consider the co-educational practice better than the one that separates the two genders, because it makes for more natural contact. And I also believe that the freer, more informal attitude between students--and also between teachers and students--makes for a much more enjoyable relationship for everybody in school. And it gives, also, more encouragement for anybody doing something exceptional. That was never so in Germany; it was a strict disciplinarian attitude towards learning as well as towards your teachers. It was always a toss-up war who would win over--in other words, be victorious, so to speak--in the relationship between the students sitting below and the teachers sitting on a podium. And it made, also, for more individual attention--hopefully--because we know about the large classes in our public schools and other schools.

And yet it seems to me it would have been better for somebody as musical as I was, with such a strong, definite preference for how to spend his or her time, if I had been raised in an American school. The famous saying that the European schools give you a background is good, but it's better on paper than it really is. Because as soon as you left after the Abitur you forgot promptly everything you had learned in school and concentrated only on the one thing which you enrolled for.

The huge amount, for instance, of Latin which was thrown at me. When I was about ten years old, I had about six to eight hours of instruction in the ancient Latin from then on all the way up to the Abitur. Greek was added, too, when I was twelve years old, and there were also about six to seven hours of Greek every week. So imagine, with those two languages, you spent twelve to fourteen hours weekly in class, plus the homework. And how much, or rather how little, how very little do I recall today? Next to nothing. I can still write the Greek script and pronounce it properly. I mean the old way, you know, as an ancient language. But it didn't even do me too much good that I had also music as a subject because that was, I think, once a week or so for one hour. And it was considered only Nebenfach--a minor subject.

French I had two measly hours a week and English none. Misery was concentrated--in other words, school was definitely not the place you would look forward to entering, but only to the time that you could get out of the damn school.

Now, the American system has also faults, in my opinion--short-comings, rather. Who am I to talk about that? One of the many bad features I see is the American system offers too many subjects for too short a time. When you travel with an American passport to Europe, you are always amused when fellow Americans talk with natives and talk to them in their language. And there's

Altman: always that funny thing that with great pride they tell you that they took two hours a week for two years in school; but what do they remember? Ten, twenty words, and they pronounce them with great pride and usually incorrectly. [laughter]

That is very alien to a European-born because in Europe you rarely display anything that is not mastered reasonably well. It is unlikely that a European would start to speak English in America, or wherever, if he only knew a few foreign words. It is just not done. If you start to speak a few words, the European assumes that you know the language and will answer rapidly and be disappointed that you cannot go on because you don't even understand what he says. That always has amused me; it's almost unfailing. So next time you go to Europe be guided by my little homily. If you know enough French or German or whatever that you can get along, hold your own in conversing with the European person, then by all means go ahead. But if you know only a smattering, don't make a fool of yourself. Just speak in your own language and let the other guy worry about mutual understanding.

Breslau During World War I

Altman: What I also remember from my years in Breslau was the devastating situation as the First World War progressed, because you know that the Allies, after they got a toehold on the U-boats--the U-boats not only stopped the food supply, it also sank so many other boats. And so as the time went on there was an ever-increasing and worsening of the food shortage. I remember very well that finally we had to eat grass which was dried on our balcony, and bread with potatoes inside. And actually dreaming of milk and butter and decent bread is still in my memory. And that, of course, changed after the end of the war. Excuse me for a moment. [tape turned off]

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IV DECISION TO LEAVE GERMANY

First Thoughts about Leaving, 1933

Glaser: Mr. Altman, how did your decision come about to leave Germany, to emigrate?

Altman: First of all, you may now call me Ludwig. After all, we have been together several times. And I can call you Elly.

Glaser: Fine.

Altman: There was a real quandary after the Hitler regime started: what to do with one's life. Basically, I'm a sedentary person: if something is good--even half good--I would rather stay than leave. This became a real problem and more and more so. The first time the idea came that leaving Germany would not only be advisable, but necessary, came to me in October, 1933. It was the first time the Jewish community of Berlin used my services as an organist. After the high holy days in 1933, they sent me as an organist to Köpenick for the harvest festival, the so-called Succoth. And there the rabbi told me very emphatically that he had no hopes whatsoever for the existence of Jewish people in Germany and he had already sent his own son to England.

This was really a very strange move to do at that early time. The basic idea of the Jewish people, and of many non-Jews, was that Hitler would run his course and things would stabilize again, either by his being overthrown by another vote of the government, or perhaps because of his ineptitude, or by whatever means. But no one anticipated the idea that Nazi power would ever become so monstrous in every respect and so destructive. And so that was the first dilemma--stay or leave.

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Altman: The trouble was also that the Jewish leaders of the time, of course with the best motivation and the earnest desire to suggest the right thing, always had the idea that particularly talented young Jewish people like myself should stay. That we could and would survive and continue our Jewish tradition in Germany. It was here that survival became the central problem. Since Hitler cut us off from all contact with non-Jews, one had to have a job within a Jewish organization. Jewish doctors could treat patients, but only Jewish ones, and so on. You get the idea, I am sure.

Glaser: Was it difficult to get out of Germany?

Altman: No, quite the opposite. Up to actual outbreak of World War II in 1939, Hitler wanted us out. Of course, leaving our remaining material substance behind.

Glaser: Where was the problem then?

Altman: Depression and unemployment had created additional grave problems for most countries, including the U.S.A. Too few German Jews were admitted; to give you an idea, the annual quota of the U.S. was a paltry 40,000. Remember that this was a highly skilled group of people in the most desperate need of a refuge. It is a miracle to me that as many got out in time as did.

Difficulty in Obtaining U.S. Visa

Glaser: Were you and Emmy, your wife, able to help someone else to get out?

Altman: Thank God, yes. Emmy brought her mother over and I both my parents. All came with one of the last transports. It was not easy to rescue them. The U.S. government wanted assurance that no one admitted to the U.S. would become dependent on public charity for five years.

Glaser: How then could you get in? Did you bring a lot of money with you?

Altman: [laughs] Heavens, no. The Nazis allowed all of ten dollars to be taken out.

Glaser: Were you married when you came over or did you meet Emmy here?

Altman: The latter.

Glaser: Did you say that your mother was in favor of your emigrating?

Altman: Yes, yes. She was also the one who wanted me to go to Berlin and not stay in Breslau; she had that knack or intuition.

Glaser: By "knack" do you mean she was foresighted and could see what was coming?

Altman: Yes. She felt it should be done this way. And so luckily I had some relatives in San Francisco who could be--let me call it imposed on and almost "roped into" helping me out and sending me the papers to get the American visa. My aunt, Pauline Freudenthal, who had a son my age. He, however, was not in San Francisco at that time; he studied at Columbia. But I moved in almost like I was another son.

Glaser: So you had no difficulty in leaving Germany at that point, and then you came directly to San Francisco?

Altman: Yes, exactly.

Glaser: And that was in 1937?

Altman: I left Germany at the very end of '36--I think Christmas, or even after Christmas.

V ARRIVAL IN AMERICA, JANUARY 8, 1937

Stay in New York

Altman: In the beginning, the language was a hardship. But you know, if you have to and if you are young, you learn quickly. Also, I found that the very best way to learn a language is to attend religious services. Absolutely, because there is usually ponderous talking, and in the sermon there are many repetitious words because the subject matter calls for it.

Glaser: Interesting. Which congregation did you go to for the services?

Altman: Well, I didn't stay in New York too terribly long, but I went usually to the Hebrew Tabernacle. There was another reason why I chose it. The cantor there hired me instantly as organist for his temple. It was one of those marvelous things that from the moment I came over, I had an uninterrupted chain of good luck coming my way. One thing after another fell into place. And it was all important towards building a new life in a new country.

Glaser: What made you decide not to stay in New York if you obtained such a position so fast?

Altman: Because I had a ticket to go to San Francisco. I accepted all jobs I got en route, but I wanted to, after all, first see what it is like to be here in San Francisco. And, of course, after I went through a January in New York, a February in Chicago, and then the March in San Francisco where the sun shone, that didn't require any more argument. [laughter]

Glaser: There was no competition.

Altman: No.

But I should then say a word about how it came about in New York--what happened to me there because that has some curiosity interest, perhaps. You know that the Hitler regime let you have

Altman: only ten dollars' worth of foreign exchange. But good luck was with me. I had a boat ticket purchased in Berlin to go through the Panama Canal, and the Panama Pacific Line was on strike when I arrived in New York. I had to be repaid the equivalent amount. So all of a sudden I had $200, which at the time was a considerable number of dollars. And with those I had some leeway all of a sudden; so that made things much better and enabled me to stay in New York.

It was not even so easy to get into New York proper. You had to have somebody waiting by the boat to take you under his arms. Now, I was fortunate. There was a very lovely gentleman, Alfred Zadig, who waited hours and hours. You know, those things are never on time. And then he and his wife--a charming lady--took me for lunch at the Madison Square Restaurant.

Glaser: How did they know that you were arriving?

Altman: Well, because Alfred Zadig's mother and my grandmother were friends from ages past. I didn't know them.

Glaser: Your mother or your grandmother wrote to them?

Altman: Yes, definitely. They had written all about it.

But one thing, a terrible sin of omission. My life in Berlin requires that I make a paragraph on one of my wonderful aunts, who has done marvels for me, and I was never grateful to her. I feel very bad about it. I could not rescue her; she wrote, but I could not do it. I got both of my parents out, but that was the extent of what I could do. That was my aunt, Rosa Jacobsohn.

Glaser: You spoke about her--she gave you meals.

Altman: Yes, that's right. Every week, on Friday and Sunday, I would go to her. And for the Mitaggbrot, which is the main meal. And not only that, but she also discussed my moves and supported them with everybody whom she knew. You know, to be always recommended and pull strings for you. She did all that in an absolutely altruistic fashion, and I never showed much appreciation. I was too dumb or too young, or whatever. But I feel very bad about those two, that I couldn't rescue their lives; but they were also too old. So, let it be said here.

Glaser: You were talking about Mr. and Mrs. Zadig, who took you to lunch.

Altman: Yes. And there I learned my first lesson. Rather, I realized that I learned it; that in America you should thank people and express appreciation freely. It's a custom and we are used to it. After a while you do it as the others do it.

Glaser: Are you saying that's not true in Germany?

Altman: Well, it is true. Of course we expressed our appreciation, but perhaps not in such an instant and continuous way. It might be only a difference in quantity; but evidently I had to learn that.

In any case, the Zadigs were wonderful. They took me to their home in New Rochelle and that's where I spent my first night.

Glaser: Did they help you find the job with the Hebrew Tabernacle?

Altman: It could very well be. It went very, very quickly. I arrived on a Thursday--January 8, I think it was, 1937--and maybe a week later I met a cantor. I don't remember his name. Who sent me to him or how I got there, I really don't recall. But I know that his invitation was to start the next Monday, which ruined me because I was never used to that promptness.

A Stop in Chicago

Altman: I stayed in Chicago a while despite the truly awful weather. I rented a room for three weeks at a total cost of five dollars. That was the Depression. I stayed because Chicago was overwhelming, in its grandeur. I even liked it better than New York because it was more concentrated. More potent reasons for staying there a while was a connection I had through the B'nai B'rith to a Rabbi Shulman in Glencoe, who had me come and audition for them as there was a vacancy for an organist. I was fortunate in getting the job offer. I played usually some Bach and some romantic music at these auditions. The synagogue was new and beautiful and the organ was a good one. I believe they really would have liked to have me stay.

Mrs. Shulman spoke about having the Women's Guild sponsor a recital in Chicago proper. In any case I had now two positions promised, the one at the Hebrew Tabernacle in New York and now also the one in Glencoe, Illinois.

I had a reunion with Allan Wayne. I do not remember if we spoke of him yet. Well, even if we did it might warrant repeating. Allan was a dancer at the opera in Breslau and I was his accompanist for his solo recitals. When I moved to Berlin to begin my studies he moved also to Berlin, not because of me so much but for a better paid job as a solo dancer in a cabaret. He was by religion a Christian Scientist but by race a Jew. Luckily his instinct or whatever advised him to leave Germany and to go home to Terre Haute where he was born.

Altman: It comes back to me as I think of it that I accompanied him to the station on Zoologischer Garten (Zoo). He was leaning out of the window as the train rolled out and repeated himself in saying "Ludwig, come to Terre Haute; we shall work out a program and go on tour in the U.S." I laughed since I saw no reason nor need to leave the country where I grew up and where my parents, grandparents, et cetera, had lived for centuries. Imagine that this happened in December of 1932, one month before Hitler became the despotic ruler of Germany and the avalanche of evil and destruction started to roll, burying millions and millions of innocent human beings.

Allan and I had a frank talk. This was February 1937, as against December 1932 when we parted, during which time I had switched more and more from the piano to the organ. We agreed that it was better to build up my organ career, also easier. There are far fewer organists than pianists and almost no Jewish ones. Tellingly all of the German Jewish refugees got top jobs in the U.S., also in Canada, England, and Australia.

Allan could see the point and understood my reasoning. We parted as good friends. We met years later once more. Allan had gone to New York in the meantime and established a dance studio of his own.

VI SAN FRANCISCO

Temple Emanu-El and Assistance to New Immigrants

Glaser: You came to this country and to San Francisco under the Freudenthal's sponsorship? Did you stay with them?

Altman: Yes. I stayed with them for three years. I occupied the place in a way of my cousin Daniel. [tape turned off while Mrs. Altman takes her leave] There were three people there: my Aunt Pauline and her sister, Aunt Rose, and Uncle Julius. He was the husband of Rose. They were marvelous to me and took me into their home on Jackson Street where I stayed three years, until my parents came.

My relatives remarked later how dead serious I looked, shlepping my old and heavy typewriter, wearing my heavy winter coat. This coat I did not wear often. I erred also in selecting my light clothes for summer. In my opinion we have only two kinds of weather in San Francisco, either cool or cold. And I thought in terms of a palm tree landscape. Now we know better and can recognize freezing tourists by their light garb.

Glaser: Did you then improve your English?

Altman: Actually, I think once I was here nobody taught me any English. I am ashamed to say, as I hear my own voice now I'm horrified. I always thought that I spoke with much less of an accent than I actually do.

We learned English in all kinds of classes, et cetera, and Temple Emanu-El was very helpful. And particularly the late Mrs. M.C. Sloss, whom you undoubtedly know by reputation. She was almost like a first lady of San Francisco. Temple Emanu-El was also very interested in the German Jews, and we had our meetings there and talks and all kinds of things to help us. It was almost better than in New York. That is one thing I don't think I

Altman: mentioned. There was, of course, a very large institution helping the Jewish refugees from Germany, like today we have it for the Soviet Jewish people. They find people who are lost.

Glaser: Isn't that the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society?

Altman: Yes, it is. But for us there were also places where you could go to ask if they had a job for you.

Glaser: Are you talking about New York or San Francisco?

Altman: Both. They are actually the same thing, only the one in New York is bigger. And I also was advised in New York to go to the organization for that purpose and I did so, but it was unsatisfactory. In all honesty I must say that sometimes those organizations are feeding on themselves and not what they are supposed to do primarily. In New York I found that to be especially true because when I went there, and there was a bevy of beautiful young girls--very pretty and so well-groomed, far prettier than the German girls.

I said, "All I would like to know, if you would be kind enough to phone some of the synagogues and ask if they can use an organist--a Jewish organist who has a fine reputation. He knows the work, he knows the service, et cetera." But that they would not do. They had to do it just exactly like for something ordinary, you know. "Unfortunately, there is nothing we can give you right now except maybe cleaning a house twice a week and those manual jobs." But they would not go out of their way of thinking. My case was very unique but at the same time very promising, because nothing is easier than to take the phone and phone three or four of the most prominent synagogues in New York. There's no mystery except a plain "yes" or "no" reply.

But I found a job at the Hebrew Tabernacle without help. And when they heard about that, they were very anxious to know how I went about it to get the job. I had to advise them where they should have advised me. But I had my lesson and when I arrived in San Francisco I bypassed our organization and went instead right away to Temple Emanu-El's cantor [Reuben R.] Rinder who in turn introduced me to Wallace Sabin, Emanu-El's organist, who not only gave me permission to play and practice on the organ but to sit with him during the service.

Mr. Sabin was a native of England, where he received his musical education mostly as an Episcopalian Church organist. He served our temple with distinction for well over thirty years. He was not in good health and had me play the more difficult scores and take over for him for vacations. His hands shook badly [indicates]. He died suddenly, conducting a concert of the Loring Club, mourned by many. Cantor Rinder wrote a beautiful eulogy. I

Altman: was touched when Mr. Sabin's daughter told me that her father had repeatedly expressed the wish that I some day should be his successor.

Teaching Piano at San Bruno Settlement House

Glaser: Even this fine job was not enough to support you, was it?

Altman: No. An organ job is, in most cases, a part-time job. It is a very strange position, professionally and financially speaking. I would say it is financially so uninviting and discouraging that many people only use it as an avocation, as a hobby even, perhaps like playing golf. Things are changing now. And since churches and synagogues have become very competitive, music in the church is actually used to attract members. Churches and temples are very concerned about getting people who can organize concerts, can organize volunteer choirs, can organize singing in religious schools, et cetera. And as that grows, so grows also the honorarium, which the top-notchers can demand and now, growingly, do demand. I think it's a move in the right direction.

Glaser: What did you do in order to earn more money? [phone rings; tape turned off temporarily]

Altman: As I mentioned before, I am gratefully aware that I had a streak of good fortune. A week or two after I arrived in San Francisco, my family--Pauline, Uncle Julius, Aunt Rose--took me over to Oakland to meet more Freudenthals and some other Mishpocha [family].

There I met Pauline Levy who worked at a settlement school on San Bruno Avenue. She told me of a vacancy for a piano teacher. That was a school for less-affluent people who could learn all kinds of things in that settlement school, which had a Miss Grace Wiener as director and principal. There was also a fund to pay a piano teacher twice a week for three hours each to teach six students for half an hour. This sounded very nice, and was actually my first job in San Francisco. But don't forget that I had already one organ job offer in New York and another one in Glencoe, Illinois, north of Chicago. And now I had this offer to become a piano teacher.

I got five dollars for each afternoon. This was certainly not much but I enjoyed the kids, mostly beginners. I found them much friendlier, more open and trusting than their counterparts in Germany, realizing the vastly different conditions between Berlin and San Francisco. Miss Wiener who interviewed me evidently took a liking to me, and I will never forget that first piano lesson which I gave. There was a young boy who came with his cap on,

Altman: which he kept on. As he sat on the piano bench I towered over him. By the window sat Miss Wiener knitting and supposedly just sitting there. But, of course, she actually wanted to see how well I would do. So I gave a little talk about how to play in my primitive English. And when I was stopping, he looked up at me and said, "What did you say, Mister?" He had not understood anything I had said.

But it did not matter and I kept the job for quite a few years, only interrupted by my stint in the U.S. Army during World War II. Miss Wiener was a wonderful human being, like a second mother to the youngsters of the district. She had untiring energy. When she retired the settlement closed up: no adequate replacement could be found.

Organist for Congregation Beth Israel

[Interview 3: April 21, 1988]##

Altman: My first organ job in San Francisco I got from Beth Israel, the Conservative temple on Geary and Fillmore. A beautiful old building with a lovely sounding organ--hard to play because of its irregular pedal keys. They were hard to push down, yet produced a rich foundation for warm string, flute and reed pipes. Unfortunately sometime later fire broke out, destroying the instrument, and it's a great loss.

Glaser: Tell me about your connection with Beth Israel.

Altman: Glad to. The organist at that time was a Christian--who could not play on the Passover, Pesach, services because it coincided with Easter. So the synagogue desperately needed an organist who could step in at the last moment. The Pesach service is not easy. It's like a Sabbath service, but with additions. So Cantor Rabinovich--a saintly man, a patriarch, a wonderful musician, but terribly hard of hearing--asked me to meet him. He was very anxious to know if I knew enough Hebrew to follow the service. I said, "Yes, I am confident. I had, after all, four years of synagogue-playing in Berlin." He said, "Well, I'll give you one question. If you can answer it, then I'll give you the job." And what was the question? "Tell me the translation of the Hebrew word chet. What is chet?" I said to the cantor, "I know the translation in German, but I don't know the English word for it." "It's all right," he said. "If you know it in German, tell me." So I said, "Chet means suende." Suende means in English, sin. And because I knew the equivalent to chet, I got this first organ job in America.

Glaser: In San Francisco.

Altman: In San Francisco, yes. In Chicago and New York, I only got the job offer, but I never actually played. I was supposed to come back or start right away, but I never did either.

Glaser: Oh, I thought you had performed there.

Altman: No, no. I only had a contract in my pocket that I could start anytime. But my engagement at Beth Israel was the actual first time that I performed and got paid.

This, my debut, produced some humorous remembrance. Cantor and choir always rehearsed in a very small room right about where the organ loft stood. There was an old harmonium standing there. The cantor was very concerned with perfection (he was, himself, a good musician) and always with the dynamics--very soft, louder, louder, again soft, et cetera. But when he went downstairs to the bima (that is the pulpit in the synagogue) he was so very hard of hearing that he could hear the choir and the organ only if everybody sang or played fortissimo. So all this fine practicing in the upstairs room was a total waste. But everybody knew about his handicap and he was so beloved that nobody criticized him; it was lovingly tolerated.

Glaser: Did you have any contact with the rabbi of the congregation?

Altman: No, you work with your rabbi very little. The music is really handled by the cantor, who learns it and knows it very well and has all the material at his fingertips. With the rabbi the relationship is like grandfather, father and son, if you want to call it that way. Only in rare cases will you have direct dealings with your rabbi, mainly in cases where you have a Christian organist or where the congregation is small and the rabbi takes more of an interest, a knowledgeable interest to be hoped for. In other words, the situation is always in flux; there is no standard way. I was always fortunate that I got along well with my rabbis, and with my cantors as well.

Glaser: Please tell me about some of the other jobs that you had before you began with Temple Emanu-El.

Altman: At first I did, of course, what everybody told me to do, that the only way to do it was to make contacts, to make yourself known. And there I was most successful, way beyond my deserving. The reason being that the prestige of German music was so overwhelming in general that it was quite easy to be accepted by the public and to be noticed and supported by the press. Here is the place and moment to recognize and to thank them for their interest in my progress. The above does by no means mean that I received only praise. At times I deserved "bad" reviews--and I got them. In the

Altman: beginning then, I made the rounds of my own colleagues, some of the fine other organists. Although there was--if you want to call it--competition, it wasn't overwhelming. Only a few, really, were very good players.

The main lack was that there was no high-class organ music played as much as trite little pieces and transcriptions from the literature of other instruments. But really top-notch, unassailable programming did not exist. And that's the way I was brought up, with very high-class literature which, however, was so limited because the European organist had to play his Bach, his Buxtehude, Franck perhaps, and a little bit of Mendelssohn. Then definitely the organ music of Max Reger--very important. But if he knew a dozen pieces, really he could go through life--musical life, organistic life--without adding much to it. And that was the way it was in the old country.

I had to adjust to this different system, this American system, when I came here. That made it necessary for me to learn a whole additional literature, but not really a high-class caliber. And so in order to combine the two, adjust to the American taste plus lifting the standards of this new-to-me American situation, I started to write my own transcriptions.

Second Church of Christ, Scientist, Berkeley

Glaser: You said that you had worked in Berkeley for a Christian Science church. Would you tell me more about that?

Altman: Yes, definitely. The next position which I acquired was of the regular organist playing for a Christian Science service. This was almost ideal for me because the Science service is uniform. In other words, the service structure and the actual reading, and the selection of the readings is international. The same lesson, as it is called, is given all over the world in the same way. If you go to a Christian Science service in Berlin or Zurich or London, it will always be the same--of course, in the native language.

I was recommended to it, and I had to be recommended because there was something already which did not exist in any other religion or religious practice. Namely that you could play the organ for the Christian Science service in churches, not only the Christian Science church, but in all churches. And that was something unthinkable in Europe--in Berlin or any other town. For instance, if you were Catholic you played in Catholic churches. You would never play in a Protestant or Lutheran church and the other way around.

Altman: The situation for the Jewish organist was again different because the Jewish people had access, contact, or connection with any of those things only after the emancipation--which started roughly in the middle of the eighteenth century--had taken hold. Synagogues and organs became actually (and I'll leave myself a few loopholes there) popular around the middle of the nineteenth century and only in a few places. There was also still the Orthodox idea very strongly held that a Jewish person who believes strictly in the sanctity of the Shabbat could not play the organ for the service because the organ was considered a machine like the streetcar. In other words, it was not permitted to be used by a Jew. And so the early organists in synagogues were Christians for that reason.

It took then the liberalized ideology of the synagogue to permit a Jewish person to play the organ in temple. And later, this turned around completely because under Hitler it was decided by the Nazi government that a Christian wouldn't even be permitted to play in a synagogue because the contact between an Aryan and a non-Aryan, as it was foolishly called, was not allowed. For all these reasons, for the first time, then,

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Altman: You found a Jewish organist in synagogues. That was totally unknown before.

Besides the Christian Science church, I also was the organist for some Baptist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches.

Glaser: You had told me that when you got the job at the Christian Science church in Berkeley you had a curfew because you were considered a German alien.

Altman: Yes. That had nothing to do with my position as such because the permission to go over there and to play or not to play or when to play was made by the military. It had nothing to do with the church.

Glaser: It's a very interesting anecdote.

Altman: Now my position was at the Christian Science church (Second Church of Christ, Scientist it's actually called) in Berkeley, and the people were just loving and very encouraging. They constantly invited me to their homes, and I made many friends over there. Although I had already applied for my American citizenship, I was not a citizen yet. So the regulations from the headquarters, when the war broke out after Pearl Harbor, stipulated that I had to submit to certain restrictions, because God forbid, we would be traitors to America. Which was an absolutely absurd idea.

Altman: We were the first total victims of Nazism, yet we were still suspect. And so I could play in church or any other place only if either I would stay there between eight in the evening and six in the morning. Or I would have to hire a police officer in his free time who would take me to the job and wait for me to take me home again. I would have to pay him whatever he wanted.

Still, being able to play evening performances and concerts was a privilege, which some other musicians shared.

So we did that. There was a funny story, when I had an engagement at the Saint Francis hotel. The police officer very nicely picked me up and delivered me and asked when I thought that he should call again to take me home. So I told him about ten o'clock in the evening. Sometimes those meetings, or whatever, last longer, and it did so in this case. All of a sudden, I heard hollering from the hall downstairs, "Mr. Altman, Mr. Altman, where are you?" There was a police officer in full uniform, and when I came down the steps everybody was staring as if I was a criminal whom he had just caught in a bad deal.

Glaser: What would happen if you didn't have a police escort, and you overstayed the curfew time?

Altman: Well, if I would have been caught--I don't know; they could throw me in prison.

When he at certain times couldn't come, then he sent another police officer; and that was a source of good income for those boys. When finally the curfew was lifted and we didn't need it anymore, they were disappointed. The police officers would even ask me--when the curfew was still on--if I had gotten somebody already for New Years. Because then he would get us somebody else for this and that other purpose. He could make money on that score.

Glaser: Did San Francisco strike you as being a small town or provincial coming from the sophisticated city of Berlin, when you first got here?

Altman: It's an excellent question, and I wish I could do it justice, but there is something in my personality which precludes any intelligent answer to the question. The reason is that I have always had a one-directional mind. In other words, if I had something of importance to me, I will totally ignore and disregard everything else. When I came to America I was interested in really only one thing, and that was to get established so I could support myself.

Bringing Parents from Germany and Marriage to Emmy

Altman: Then right away I had to have the means to support my parents on a monthly scale. As life for the Jews in Germany took a turn for the worse, becoming more threatening and dangerous all the time, their pleas to be gotten out became more urgent and desperate. I undertook their coming over by my guaranteeing their support.

Glaser: How did you manage that when you had been here such a short time yourself?

Altman: I don't know; that is one of the miracles in my life. I cannot answer that. It is contradictory to say that I was very poor, and yet I always had money, at least enough for the need of the moment.

Did we talk about the affidavit?

Glaser: I don't think so. Please, explain.

Altman: Its possession or not possession meant literally the difference between life and death in most cases. It was an application by an American citizen to the U.S. Government to grant a relative living in another country a visa to enter the United States as visitor or to settle in the U.S. as a permanent citizen. I am sure that we spoke of the deplorably small number of visas issued, around forty thousand a year for Germany.

Glaser: Did the Freudenthal family help you bring them over?

Altman: Yes. They gave the affidavit for myself so that made it possible for me to come to the U.S. If they also gave it for my parents, I do not remember. You had to show the American Consul that you were financially capable of taking care of whoever got the affidavit for five years. Now my aunt took a chance with me. Suppose I would have been a bum, or I would have been a failure. Then they would have been stuck because the government would not support any alien who was not earning a living. So the Freudenthals took a chance vouching for me and my parents. But it worked out well. There was never any problem because there was no demand made on the American government for support of any of us.

Glaser: Did your sister come over with your parents at the same time?

Altman: No. My sister had already left Germany to go to what then was Palestine. She left even before I came here. I recall my taking her to the railroad station in Berlin to send her off to Palestine to one of the kibbutzim. In other words, she had what was very highly prized, even envied at that time, a Palestine certificate.

Altman: She was only sixteen years old; it was really terrible--the separation from my parents. She needed them very much, particularly my mother. So that's that.

Glaser: Where did your parents live when they first came over? You were still living with the Freudenthals.

Altman: I put them up in a very nice place on California Street opposite Temple Sherith Israel. But then it seemed so much better, also financially, if they and I would live together. We did that and had a very nice place on Sixth Avenue and Lake Street. It's a corner place. Today the place is scandalously run down; it is terrible. But at that time it was very nice. I think it was forty dollars a month--six rooms--thanks to the OPA [Office of Price Administration]. The owner liked this much less. But, of course, leaving the Freudenthal family was not easy. We had grown very fond of each other, and I think of them always with gratitude and love.

Glaser: Did your father attempt to find work when he came here, or was he too old?

Altman: He was about sixty-two. He did work, but it was nothing in any advanced line. I would call it casual work.

Glaser: I think the temple, or was it the federation, set up a workshop for refugees. Did he work in that?

Altman: I don't know if it was exactly that, but it was on that scale, I would say.

Glaser: When you married Emmy in December 1940, did you have a permanent job with Temple Emanu-El?

Altman: No. I got that job already in '37.

Glaser: Where did you and Emmy set up housekeeping?

Altman: Well, I think my parents moved in with my Aunt Pauline. That's the way it was. They moved out then and moved in with Aunt Pauline. I don't even think she was there the whole year. She was a lot in New York.

Glaser: That's Mrs. Pauline Freudenthal?

Altman: Yes. There were more people there then. Pauline Freudenthal has a sister, Rose, who was married to Uncle Julius. So I had Aunt Pauline, Aunt Rose, Uncle Julius--those three. I believe Uncle Julius died first. So it was just the two ladies, and then my parents moved in with them. My mother got herself a part-time job as a companion to an old spinster, a Mrs. Rich.

Altman: We moved to the place on Sixth and Lake, Emmy and I, and at time we had her mother also there. Emmy got her mother out of Germany in the nick of time also.

Glaser: Was her father not alive anymore?

Altman: Her parents were divorced. The mother was difficult. She kicked her father out, although he wanted to stay married to her. That's the way Emmy said it was.

Glaser: Was there a housing shortage because of the new war industry, the ship building that started in this area?

Altman: I don't know. I have an unusual theory about problems like that. You know when some people say, "I cannot get a teaching job because there are five thousand teachers already out of work," I never believed in that logic. Because you don't want five thousand jobs, you want just one. It's an individual thing. You need only one place--you don't have to worry about a shortage on your personal level. So I don't think we had that problem of a housing shortage, no.

Then my parents moved to stay with another family of refugees at a lovely place on the corner of Clay and Presidio. My mother-in-law had a place on Clay Street very close to the one I just mentioned. There was a family Wolf--Jewish refugees from Berlin--she had a room and meals there.

Emmy came in August '38, more than a year and one-half after me. Of course, we didn't know each other.

VII INTERVIEW WITH EMMY ALTMAN

[Interview 2: April 11, 1988]##

Meeting Ludwig, January 1940, Marriage December 1940

Glaser: Emmy, will you tell us about meeting Ludwig?

Mrs. Altman: Certainly. We met by chance in January 1940. I was teaching at the Dominican College in San Rafael.

Glaser: What were you teaching?

Mrs. Altman: I taught French, German, and world history. I taught there since I came from Germany. I was very fortunate that I found a job in my profession.

It was a grey Sunday afternoon. I was invited to a dinner in the city, and I had some time to kill. So I visited this friend of mine on Clay Street. And the moment the door opened, I knew I was most unwelcome and I was very embarrassed. I wanted to get out as fast as I could, but they ushered me to a back room and the mother came and the daughter came. And finally the door opened and in walked Ludwig. And I knew then why [laughing] I wasn't supposed to be there: they didn't want me to meet Ludwig. But then I said, "I have to go now." And he said he had to go, too, and so we both walked out. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I have to go to Euclid Avenue." He said, "I will take you there."

So we walked and talked, and we had a lot in common because we both had studied Germanic literature. My aunt had a friend who was very close to his relatives, so I knew all about him--that he had made already a wonderful career and so on.

Mrs. Altman: That evening, about nine o'clock, the doorbell rang. It was a dinner party, but I had to go back to San Rafael, of course. There was Ludwig saying he wanted to take me to the bus. And that was the beginning [laughs] of the courtship and finally that led to getting married.

Of course, there were many obstacles. Ludwig had just brought out his parents and I had my mother come, and so it took us a year. We finally got married in December 1940. We met in January and it took us about a year-- [sound of car horn heard from outside] This is my friend.

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VIII THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1943-1945

Inducted into the Army

Altman: Emmy, while I courted her, was teaching at the Dominican College in San Rafael. But once we got married, she quit that job. But then there were problems right away because the draft board went after me, putting me into a uniform (U.S. Army) at fifty dollars a month, although I had to support my parents, and Emmy was the sole support of her mother.

And so I was sent to army headquarters downtown for induction into the army. In preparation for that I had learned to play the clarinet. I knew already Uncle Sam was looking for me, so I learned that to some extent. I took lessons from a fine teacher and I sat in on several high school bands. I was at Lowell High School and at Washington High School to get some experience in ensemble playing. It did me a lot of good; it was a very smart move to make.

Then in the spring of '43, I think it was, the air force bands were looking for people to be inducted into the armed forces for use (maybe it was already sooner, maybe '42) in the air force bands. That appealed very greatly to me because I knew if I had to go, I'd much rather go to an air force band than to an army band. There was a meeting at the musician's union here in San Francisco at 230 Jones Street. I know it so well because I went there so many times having been a member for so many years. There was a major or captain, whatever, from headquarters to interview young fellows (I wasn't so young; I was about thirty-two) to get inducted into the air force.

So I went there, and I was interviewed, and I was rejected. I asked at the musician's union why I was rejected. The union people said: "It was not the music, but you are too nervous for the air force." I replied: "The man saw me for just ten-fifteen minutes."

Altman: Their answer: "You are too nervous because the air force officer could tell that you bite your fingernails." Isn't that something? I don't know if that's something for the biography?

Glaser: Yes, absolutely.

Altman: But by contrast the army was not so fussy. They had me come down sometime later, maybe a half a year or so and examined me. But they also didn't take me. They sent me back home again and said, "No. In two weeks, or three weeks, we will tell you the reason."

After only ten days or less, I got another induction order, and that came from the same draft board as before. I asked how come that I have to go again for yet another examination so soon? I was told that in due time I would be notified why they didn't take me. I don't know if he gave any reason, or if so I forgot it.

In any case, I had to go back after ten days and was examined again. The lieutenant, who had a sense of humor, said "We disappointed you last time, didn't take you, didn't give you the job. We'll do you a favor this time and take you." [laughter] As it turned out, I was very happy, and I hope I did some good. So that's how I got into the army.

Assigned to the Army Band, Fort Mason, San Francisco

Glaser: What did you do and where were you stationed?

Altman: I went into the Fort Mason band--actually without any training. I did not have basic training. I wouldn't have survived anyway because I was already thirty-two, thirty-three and definitely not of any physical ability. I remember when I went to Monterey, when I got that huge stuff to carry on my back, I couldn't handle it at all. I wanted to go left, and the thing on my back made me go right.

One of the boys came to my rescue and helped me carry the stuff over to the right barracks. And there was no bunk except in the aisle. Then at four in the morning, we had to take an examination about our intelligence and so on and so forth. But it ended well. I was in the band, and there were many musical experiences which were very humorous in retrospect.

I was pursued by good luck. I got into the Fort Mason band here at the port of embarkation. It was marvelous. The band was way over-strength. Instead of a maximum of twenty-eight, we had forty-two musicians, and we had wonderful conditions. We had a very nice band leader, a chief warrant officer by the name of Louis C.

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Rabbi Aryeh Lev
Director

July 15, 1946

Dear Friend:

Enclosed you will find a certificate of appreciation for the service that you rendered to the religious welfare of Jewish personnel during the war. It goes to you with the gratitude of the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities, and the Jewish families of America.

This war imposed special difficulties on the Jewish religious community. Over half a million Jewish personnel were scattered in innumerable military installations throughout the world. Although over half the rabbis of the country offered their services to the chaplaincy, they could not possibly serve in all installations. Therefore, the furtherance of the Jewish religious program in many places was dependent on the devotion of Jewish G.I.'s and officers and the sympathetic cooperation of Christian chaplains.

We wish to give some tangible evidence of our appreciation to those who served in this way. This certificate goes to you with our heartfelt appreciation for that special service which you rendered.

Sincerely yours,

Frank L. Weil

FRANK L. WEIL
President
National Jewish Welfare
Board

David de Sola Pool

DAVID de SOLA POOL
Chairman, Committee on
Army and Navy Religious
Activities

Altman: Tilton. He was a fairminded, decent gentleman who was a professional soldier who knew his way around, pleasing the generals and their ladies. He was a natural musician who was thrilled to have such a large ensemble under his command. Half of the band was from Local 6 in the musician's union here. The other half was the hillbillies--that was the original one from the Ozarks. Although they had all the stripes, we looked down on them, of course. Because they were already in the band before the war, the sergeants and corporals were all from the hillbillies. They had most of the stripes and the local fellows had only a few because they got into the band later.

The other half were highly sophisticated from the band or from the San Francisco Symphony and so on. I played clarinet, but I actually played the organ for all Jewish services through the whole time and also for many of the Protestant and Catholic services. Yet I was always glad to go back to the band where I played the clarinet. The chapel's Hammond organs were the early unimproved kind. Better than nothing is the best one can say. As chaplain's assistant I had to clean up the chapel, which I hated to do, after playing for so many weddings. There was always rice all over the place and it was very disorderly. And I had to fix flowers for which I had no talent at all. The boy who did that regularly was very good at that.

So I got by and actually made contributions towards the overall war effort way beyond the average call of duty.

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Glaser: You were telling me about the general's wife.

Altman: She would phone over to the barracks, "Can you send Pfc. Ludwig Altman over to entertain at tea." So I would go over, play "Rhapsody in Blue," "Hungarian Rhapsody," music of that kind; also "Clair de lune," "Moonlight Sonata," walzes, you get the idea.

Glaser: On the piano?

Altman: Yes, all on the piano, also lighter numbers. Then they would give me tea and wonderful cookies, which was very nice.

There were all kinds of funny stories. One for instance: I never learned how to shoot with live ammunition because I was right away sent to Fort Mason without any basic training. During the week when I came through the induction center in Monterey, there was an order from headquarters in Utah that all the next inductees who could play a band instrument should be put instantly into a band. So I was sent to Fort Mason although I never had any basic training. But headquarters eventually caught up with us and taught us how to shoot. I was the only bandsman who was a born and raised

Altman: German--even called an enemy alien, so I was happy and grateful that through my induction into the Armed Forces I had become a full-fledged American citizen.

I was the only one who could never hit the target. When we were first tested for all our prowess, or not prowess, as shooters on the pistol range, we went over to the Presidio. There was a moving target, and you were given six rounds of ammunition to shoot at the target. Then it was counted how many times you hit it and how close to the center. So after you had done that, you counted how many holes you had made on the target and that became your score.

Now the fellow who shot ahead of me liked me particularly well, and he knew that I would never hit the target. So he shot at it and then pasted over his holes and left two holes open. The idea was that at least I would have hit the target twice, and it wouldn't look too bad on my score card. Then a miracle happened in that I hit the damn target every single time. [laughter] So the news spread like wildfire that Private Altman--it was on the bulletin board all over Fort Mason in every barrack--had miraculously made seven holes with five bullets. [laughter]

Later on either Herb Caen or Jack Rosenbaum picked it up after the war. I don't know how. As it happened, additionally, that took place after I was in the army for one whole year, at which time you became practically automatically a private first class. You made Pfc and got one stripe and four dollars more a month. Instead of fifty dollars, you got fifty-four. So that was one funny thing.

Another one was there was another boy in the army by the name of Maury Wolohan. He and I were somehow left out of going to the dispensary to get the shots. You get those shots all the time, but by some quirk, we were not on the list. During the entire war, when all the band trudged up there to the dispensary and those untrained sergeants just gave you the shots-- The musicians were always ill after that experience. They came back and couldn't hold the instrument. Maury and I were the only ones in best of health.

But the nemesis came when we were discharged, when the whole things was over. It was in September of '45 after the surrender of Japan. We went up there to get our release from the dispensary to go then to Marysville or Oroville, one of those where we were discharged. The sergeant pulled our dossier or record. He said, "It's empty; you have never got any shots." So we said, "No, we were never asked to go up. We kept our mouths shut because that's what we were told to do in the army--keep your mouth shut." So he said, "Well, I cannot give you the discharge here. There are just two things I can do: either I can give you the shots in the right

Altman: order; then you have to stay in the army another three years. Or the other thing is I can give you all the shots at once right now, but you die from that."

Maury was a big talker. He said, "Let us see the captain or the major." So, of course, we got out. Nobody cared anymore. The whole thing was over. But that was a lucky, funny thing.

Glaser: You were lucky; otherwise you would have been very sick. One of the shots is tetanus, and that makes your arm very sore.

Altman: Yes. They couldn't play; they couldn't hold their instruments.

Glaser: Tetanus, and malaria, and smallpox.

Altman: They got all that, but the band was always threatened with being sent overseas.

But we had band duties.* We had to go out at anytime to play for the departure and return of the boats which were in the Pacific Fleet. It was worse when they came back from overseas. That was heartbreaking, even to us, when all the wounded sailors and army people and particularly the WACs--that was the girls--came back. The shell-shocked ones who had gone crazy.

Crawford: Did they recover?

Altman: There were facilities for them. They were goners. They lived and they ate, that was all.

Crawford: Where did they stay?

Altman: On the peninsula was the hospital. When they came down the ramp--that was an evening you'd never forget.

Crawford: And you played for them?

Altman: Yes. We played the band so loud at that time, and we played nothing but fine music.

Crawford: But they were very afflicted, weren't they?

Altman: Oh, it was sad, unspeakably sad.

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*Material from interview conducted by Caroline Crawford.

Crawford: Why particularly the WACs?

Altman: Because one didn't associate girls with wars. World War II used women in large numbers for the first time. Before it was always only the males who served.

Crawford: I have some pictures of the band marching down Market Street.

Altman: Yes. We had a very big band. The strength of a band was supposed to be twenty-eight. But our band leader, who was a real old army man, finagled it so we had always about forty-two players. Once in a while, somebody got upset in the headquarters that the band is over-strength--to let about a dozen or so people out. But our band leader was always so clever. He got around it; we would serenade the general on his birthday--things like that. He knew how to act.

I was in a good situation anyway because if the band would have been shipped out we would have become a medical band. However, I would not have gone with the band because I was one of the extras; I would have been assigned to one of the large transport boats as the chaplain's assistant. So from that point of view, I was in a fortunate position.

But while it went on, it was still a very harrowing time, and it was awful even so. We were grateful as long as we stayed here. Half of the band were hillbillies from the Ozarks--people whom I had never met before. They were so different--the way they behaved and acted.

For instance, there was one who went with a girl, but that girl when she could get a higher-ranking man dropped him like he never existed. He was so unhappy that our conductor, who was an officer, gave him a ticket for a ball game. That made him so happy that he forgot all about the girl. [laughter]

Then we had one fellow who cut our hair. He was supposed to charge no more than twenty-five or fifty cents, but he always demanded more. Nobody said anything. All characters.**

**End of Crawford material.

Propaganda Leaflets and Other Sidelines

Glaser: I think you mentioned that while you were in the army you wrote an analysis of the natural character of the German people.

Altman: I did, and what was a little even more valuable was I made model leaflets to be thrown.

Glaser: Propaganda leaflets?

Altman: Yes, and I wrote those bilingual.

Glaser: Were you taken out of the band to do this specialized work?

Altman: No, I did that on my own. But I did a lot of other things while I was in the band.

Glaser: Tell me about them, please.

Altman: Well, these things which we just spoke about, and then I played a lot of piano. At that time I had a very good memory; I could almost memorize instantly. There was one piece called Repartee by a composer whose last name I think was Bennett. That was a jazzy piece. I got it there; I didn't have any knowledge of it before. I played the piano like a real big solo, and the band accompanied me. We had a first rehearsal on a Tuesday, I remember, and on Tuesday afternoon I learned it from memory. On Wednesday we played it together with the bandleader, and I played it also from memory. Whenever they wanted it, I would sit down and play it.

I have to say one cannot praise the American mentality enough. How the boys reacted--you don't have to say anything. I said nothing about it, and they were really taken by that. They were very easy going from then on; it was quite important.

Glaser: What gave you the idea to write the analysis of the character of the German people and your propaganda leaflets? What gave you the idea to do these on your own, and to whom did you give this material?

Altman: The reason was that whatever I have done I was always possessed by that mania, almost, that it must be an addition; it must be a contribution. The word "contribution" is the main word. I have done it always. Also when I played the organ recitals, I have always felt if I cannot make a contribution, I don't do it at all. I would just add to the noise. I felt I would steal from the people who came to hear it. And something of that sort was the reason.

Altman: The person to whom I gave it was a captain of army intelligence, Captain Metow was his name. He had an office downtown, and I went to see him. I turned it over to him to mail it or not to mail it--whatever he decided, whatever he thought it was worth--to headquarters in Washington. Something must have been done because I do have a thank-you letter from Dag Hammarskjöld, a very top man.

Glaser: He was secretary-general of the United Nations.

Altman: Yes.

Glaser: Was he in the U.S. Intelligence at the time?

Altman: No. That must have been something else, because I have a letter from him. But I have some things I did get about the things I wrote. I have it upstairs.

Glaser: So you know the propaganda was used.

Altman: Well, that I don't know. I'm sure it didn't hurt, but I made the effort in any case.

I was at the United Nations Conference that was here in '45. Truman was our president then. Here was Molotov, van Sittart, some of the big shots. There was a band made up of the various categories. We had boys from the navy, from the air force, and our Fort Mason band also. I was chosen as one--believe it or not--clarinet player. Although I was not much of a player, having learned it so late in life and for only a short time.

I sat in the opera house where the meetings took place, and I did see all those famous men. The most famous that comes to mind, of course, is Molotov. I was as close to him as I am to you because I could sit in the audience. They sat around. It was an experience which meant a great deal to me.

Meeting with Thomas Mann

Glaser: Was it at this time that you met Thomas Mann?

Altman: No. Thomas Mann I met at the beginning of my army time, and on June 15, I think it was. Did I show you that letter?

Glaser: Yes.

Altman: Also the book where that is written up?

Glaser: No. Did you meet Mr. Mann personally?

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NEW YORK

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

24 June 1955

Dear Mr. Altman,

It gives us much pleasure to thank you most sincerely for your generosity in making available to the United Nations your great talent on the occasion of our reception last Tuesday evening at the California Palace of the Legion of Honour.

All of the delegates and guests enjoyed your playing enormously and we feel that the beautiful music contributed greatly to the success of the occasion.

Sincerely yours,

E. N. van Kleffens

Eelco N. van Kleffens
President of the Commemorative Meetings

Dag Hammarskjold
Secretary-General

Mr. Ludwig Altman
1656 18th Avenue
San Francisco, Cal.

Altman: Indeed and right here in San Francisco. I was attracted by his novels and short stories while a teenager. Mann is a virtuoso in using the German language in an entirely novel, highly original way. With this unique gift he transports you into the world he conjures up. It is almost hypnotic, this ability to portray the backgrounds of time and place. Even more magical is Mann's genius in describing people so that you think they are standing before you. This cunning demonstration of verbal portrait painting, by the way, has brought Mann a lot of trouble because he often used family members and friends as models in his freely invented prose.

Because of his towering prominence Thomas Mann became something of an uncrowned king and a spokesman for the many thousands of refugees in the U.S. and elsewhere, as well as for numberless others, not Jewish, victims of Nazi barbarism. Mann's speeches were broadcast to Germany during World War II. Mann, who lived from 1875 to 1955, was used to taking a stand on topics of the day, be they political, moral, ethical, literary, musical (these especially), et cetera, and it is here where the story of my meeting Mann comes in.

Since the story was not told elsewhere and should be, here goes at long last. In June of 1943, Mann was invited to give a speech in our Civic Auditorium on the evils and dangers of the Nazi regime. A huge crowd was on hand for a standing ovation. There was some music, Isaac Stern, no less, played violin solos, a soprano sang and the organ music was provided by me.

Having shared the program with my revered author, I felt encouraged to drop in on him and his wife Katia at the Fairmont Hotel where they were staying. Mrs. Mann did not like the idea of my coming up very much as it would take away precious time, but Thomas prevailed and a short visit was granted. This was extended to two hours, from 10 to 12 o'clock. The couple found out quickly that I was indeed thoroughly familiar with Mann's output, partly knowing it from memory.

Two comments are remembered by me. I am referring to the quality in his writings, works which I call "in free style," like the novels (Buddenbrooks, Death in Venice, The Magic Mountain, et cetera), and on the other hand his commentaries on the problems of the day. I had the nerve to suggest that the first category was to be preferred over the second and that it would be far better to have still more novels from his pen than to have essays on the lives and doings of leaders of the past and even the present. Mann seemed to be a little shaken and his comment was a mere: Ja, aber man muss doch zu den Problemen und Ereignissen des Tages Stellung nehmen (Yes, but one has to take a stand to the events of the day after all).

Altman: Of far greater importance than this episode was a discussion regarding an article I had written on the subject, "Our great Symphonies Were Written by Lonely Men." This was very much in the thinking of Mann himself who has expressed the thought that creative artistry makes the artist a flop vis-a-vis the joys of a "normal" life. A case in point is the true story of Tchaikovsky and a wealthy lady friend in Russia who was so enamoured with him that she attended all his concerts, especially first performances, yet never met her idol nor seemed to have a desire to do so.

In a handwritten letter to me, Thomas Mann confirmed that this story was new to him and that he found it Merkwürdig (noteworthy).

One can imagine my joy when some time later I found that this story of Tchaikovsky and Madame de Tolna, as she is called in Mann's late novel Doktor Faustus, has become an integral section of his late masterpiece. In talking to the Thomas Mann Gesellschaft this summer I was encouraged to put the above in verbal form to be used in one of the forthcoming year books of this worthy society, which is doing so much in keeping alive the work of German's greatest novelist of the first half of the twentieth century.

Program

Mass Meeting Against Nazi Extermination of Jews and Other Minorities

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 1943 • CIVIC AUDITORIUM • SAN FRANCISCO

1. NATIONAL ANTHEM . . . . . *Miss Verna Osborne*
   accompanied by Ludwig Altman
2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:
   SOL SILVERMAN, *Chairman*
   United Jewish Committee of San Francisco
   JOSEPH S. THOMPSON, *Chairman of the Evening*
   DR. AURELIA REINHARDT
3. THOMAS MANN
4. SACRED HEBREW CHANTS . . . *Cantor Ben G. Nosowsky*
   accompanied by Ludwig Altman
5. RABBI JAMES G. HELLER
6. VIOLIN SELECTIONS . . . . . *Isaac Stern*
   accompanied by Lev Shorr
7. DR. HUBERT PHILLIPS
8. EDDIE CANTOR
9. FINALE . . . . . *March: God Bless America—organ*

Auspices

UNITED JEWISH COMMITTEE OF SAN FRANCISCO
AGAINST NAZI EXTERMINATION OF JEWS
AND OTHER MINORITIES

251 Kearny Street, San Francisco, Room 308
Telephone DOuglas 5950

Pac. Palisades Calif.
den 26. II. '43

Lieber Herr Altmann,

nochmals Dank für den Aufsatz, den ich mit grossem Interesse gelesen habe. Sein Grundgedanke ist sicher eine Wahrheit. Besonders frappiert hat mich die Geschichte von Tschaikowsky und der reichen russischen Aristokratin, seiner Freundin, die er niemals gesehen hat. Ich kannte diese Geschichte nicht und finde sie höchst merkwürdig.

Die Schreckung von Schumanns Genie war wohl weniger die Folge seines Ehe-glücks, als der progressiven Paralyse, von der Sie freilich nicht gut sprechen konnten.

Es war schön, dass ich mich noch mit Ihnen unterhalten konnte. Ich hoffe, man sieht sich einmal wieder.

Ihr ergebener
Thomas Mann.

Pacific Palisades, Calif.
June 20, 1943

Lieber Herr Altmann,

Nochmals Dank fuer den Aufsatz den ich mit grossen Interesse gelesen habe. Sein Grundgedanke ist sicher eine Wahrheit. Besonders frappiert hat mich die Geschichte von Tschaikovsky und der reichen russischen Aristrokratin, seiner Freundin, die er niemals gesehen hat. Ich kannte diese Geschichte nicht und finde sie hoechst merkwuerdig.

Die Schrumpfunf von Schumanns Genie war wohl weniger die Folge seines Ehegluecks, als der progressiven Paralyse, von der Sie freilich nicht gut sprechen koennten.

Es war schoen, dass ich mich noch mit Ihnen unterhalten konnte. Ich hoffe, man sieht sich einmal wieder.

Ihr ergebener
Thomas Mann

Translation:

Dear Mr. Altmann,

agasin thanks for the essay, which I read with great interest. The basic idea is surely based on fact. I was especially intrigued by the story about Tchaikovsky and the wealthy Russian lady aristrocat, his friend, whom he has never met. I did not know of this story and find it most peculiar.

The regression of Schumann's genius was probably less a consequence of his marital bliss and the result of the progressive paralysis, of which you could not easily speak.

It was nice for me to be able to talk with you. I hope, we see each other again in future.

Yours truly
Thomas Mann

IX RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE AND TEMPLE EMANU-EL

Cantor Reuben R. Rinder

Glaser: I assume following your discharge you immediately returned to your position with Temple Emanu-El. Over the years you had a very close relationship with Cantor Reuben Rinder. His wife has been interviewed for our office, but I'd like to hear from you about Cantor Rinder's personality and what he was like to work with.

Altman: He was a very dominant person in the temple, and how I got there, it was right away when I came to New York. When the people heard that I was going to San Francisco, they would automatically say, "Oh, then you must meet Cantor Rinder." The main musician in the Jewish field in New York at that time was Abraham Binder. Do you know that name?

Glaser: No.

Altman: You never heard of it. He was a good musician, very instrumental in the advancement of Jewish liturgical music. He was also a political power. The situation of the Jewish people in New York is unique in the entire world because it's like a complete empire in itself and by itself. Two million Jewish people almost at that time in greater New York, and they thought of themselves almost like they had a king, and rabbis all over the place, and really no need to go outside if you didn't want to.

Binder also manipulated almost--if the word is correct--many things: that people were engaged or not engaged and where played and all that. He said, "Cantor Rinder ist ein Lieblicher Mann," a lovely person. That translation is not quite correct. And so I went to Cantor Rinder, and he introduced me to Wallace Sabin who was the organist of Temple Emanu-El. Sabin was a Christian, educated in London, the Royal College, a regular Episcopalian, who, however, played in the Christian Science church, at one of them in San Francisco, and conducted the Lowering Club. That was a club of male singers, all voluntary of course.

Altman: Sabin was about sixty-nine years old, and he was definitely a very nervous man. His hands always shook and he was not too much given to practice anymore or to learn new pieces. He got along more or less by just diddling--improvising it was called. A wonderful person and once evidently a very fine, even outstanding, musician. I became an unofficial assistant of Wallace Sabin, and I could practice on the organ as long as I wanted and as much because he did not do it anymore. So I sat with him at the Shabbat services, and whenever something difficult to play came along, I would play it and just move on the bench.

Sabin died suddenly while conducting a concert of his choral group, the day after I think it was. I got a phone call from Cantor Rinder saying "Ludwig, such and such happened to Mr. Sabin. (I think it was a Wednesday or a Thursday.) Now you continue just like you have been doing." So I got the job actually by default. I was there at the right moment, and there was a need for a replacement. And the fact that I was young, that I was Jewish, that I was a refugee. But they did not give me the salary which Sabin got. It was way down.

The financial situation of organists in general is not good; it's very bad. I did well, but only because I did an enormous amount of musical work. Whenever I look into the diary of that period I cannot believe my eyes. I worked literally all seven days and three to four evenings all my life until now. Now its of course totally different.

So that's how it began, and with the cantor I had no particular problem because Cantor Rinder trusted me. And his strength was not in the chanting; he had some vocal problems which made it necessary for him to give up singing, and so he evolved a way of speaking over an organ background. Most of the cantorial solos were sung by a chorus member, usually by a non-Jewish chorus member, for many years primarily by Stanley Noonan, a wonderful person with a gorgeous voice and superb artistry. That his outstanding, loyal and long service could be left unrecognized was one of the few disappointments I experienced at Emanu-El. Often we mused: If only Stan could be Jewish, what a career he would have made. Cantor Rinder had a standard reply for these thoughts: "The others deserve something good, too."

##

Altman: Cantor Rinder made a lasting contribution to Jewish music in commissioning illustrious Jewish composers to write new settings of the liturgy. He usually stipulated that there would be an added part, all recited, not sung, and with instrumental background. This would give the cantor the opportunity to participate in the service. This spoken part was called recitant.

Glaser: Did his difficulty show up as far back as when you joined Temple Emanu-El in 1937?

Altman: Yes, even before. The great services for which he is responsible, by Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud, contain whole sections of prayers which would normally have been sung by the cantor but in this instance are spoken by the recitant with background music mostly for organ. Cantor Rinder's main contribution, musically speaking, is the commissioning of four services: Sacred Service of Ernest Bloch, Sacred Service of Darius Milhaud, Sacred Service of Marc Lavry of Israel, and three beautiful psalms by Paul Ben-Haim of Israel. All of those were eventually given either in premier performance in Europe or later in our temple.

Glaser: Did you have a personal relationship with Cantor Rinder and possibly Mrs. Rinder?

Altman: Oh, yes, of the most friendly kind. The first time when I played for the wedding of Meta Rinder, their daughter, which was about the most beautiful wedding the temple ever had, at least in my experience. We had the whole temple decorated with trees and with flowers when spring came. I never saw the temple as beautiful as on that occasion. Frequently we were invited to their home; they were very nice to me and Emmy.

Cantor Rinder had the rare gift of making you feel good whenever you came to him with a problem. He used a special system in auditioning singers by always praising them first for their potentials and then point out their shortcomings. This he called: "You have to let them down gently."

Mrs. M. C. Sloss and Mrs. Marcus Koshland

Glaser: Would you tell me about Mrs. M. C. Sloss?

Altman: Before we do that I would like to say a word also about Mrs. Rinder. She was also brilliant. She looked lovely, was a very lovely lady, hospitable and a tremendous supporter and support for Rob. Rob did have problems, particularly with some of the rabbis who couldn't accept his overpowering personality and his popularity with some of the very influential people. Perhaps also the fact of the one thing he could not do, namely chant the services, which after all is the main raison d'être, as the French call it. There were problems, and one was aware of them. Yet the cantor always rose above them and in a way won out.

Altman: Now about Mrs. M. C. Sloss: Yes, the first thing I knew about her was a little foreboding. In December 1937, when Wallace Sabin died rather suddenly, she was out of town. Cantor Rinder said, "That is too bad because we would really need her okay for you to stay here as organist. Now she is out of town. I'll take a chance, and I hope she will be satisfied when I tell her about my engaging you." Luckily she was and she was very nice to me; she was helpful. She was actually what I thought of as the First Lady of San Francisco, the First Jewish Lady, certainly. She was very, very important in the temple.

I will never forget how our then-Rabbi Reichert (who was very nice to Emmy and to me) always went up to her after every service to find out if she liked the sermon and how much she liked it. And it was very important that she liked it because she did not mince words. I found frequently that elderly women of that kind, who are well-educated, very intelligent, and outspoken, are really very, very important to the top hierarchy, and how much they depended on their good will and appreciation.

Glaser: I understand Mrs. Sloss used to have musical evenings in her home, particularly at Hanukkah and Passover, in which you played.

Altman: Actually it was at Mrs. Marcus Koshland's home. Mrs. Koshland and Mrs. Sloss were very close friends. Mrs. Koshland had an organ in her home, in that very large mansion which you probably have seen; I think it's on Washington Street.

Glaser: Le Petit Trianon?

Altman: Is that what it's called?

Glaser: At that time I think it was; it was supposed to be a copy of it.

Altman: Well, in any case, yes, we had it every year at Hanukkah time with the famous mulled wine. There was always a musical, and we always used the organ. That was a player organ; it was hard to play because all the keys were worn out and played at the slightest touch. We usually had music by Handel, the Judas Maccabeus, and other things. It was very festive, very lovely. When Mrs. Koshland died, one of the sons called me over and as we sat at the organ bench he said, "What should I do with the instrument now?"

I answered, "Why not give it to the temple." So he said, "It's a good idea." And so the instrument was taken over to the Meyer Memorial Auditorium at the temple. He gave in addition a large sum of money, so we could modernize the touch (very necessary) and add a stop to it. The organ is still being used on the High Holidays for the overflow for the final service, for the N'ilah service. It's a very nice instrument with a lovely sound.

Altman: Mrs. Sloss tragically fell into a coma for a long time; she was living in a downtown hotel. One remembers the good years when she was younger. She was terrific, a highly-intelligent born leader.

Glaser: In our first interview you said, "Many times the organist outdraws the minister. Sometimes there is almost a conflict and the organist has to be diplomatic." Did you find that true at Temple Emanu-El?

Altman: No, because my position at Emanu-El is actually a little different from what the general idea is. The general idea is now that my work at Temple Emanu-El is predominant almost to the exclusion of other activity. But this is only now since I'm an emeritus and only now play at the Legion of Honor as co-organist with John Fenstermaker, formerly with Newton Pashley, formerly with Richard Purvis, and give some lessons and work on musical things not connected with the temple. But really during most of my life--now I've been an organist for about fifty-five years at least--I did more outside the temple than in the temple itself. About two-thirds of my activity was outside--one-third was here at the temple.

Relationships with Rabbis

Glaser: Does that mean that you didn't have that much contact with the various rabbis, starting with Rabbi Reichert?

Altman: No. Instead I had a number of part-time jobs, the temple being the most important but by no means the only one. It accounted for about one-third of my total time, energy and income. For this reason I had no desire nor ambition to try and make Emanu-El full time. I was worried that the congregation might get tired of hearing the same organ grinder year after year. By my being the official organist of the San Francisco Symphony, by my being organ soloist of the Pops in the Civic Auditorium almost every summer, by hearing of my being engaged in London, New York, Boston, Zurich, Oslo, Berlin, Munich, Bern, Canterbury, Burmingham, Lausanne, Montreux, et cetera, of a growing number of publications--my local audience might hopefully think: "Why change since our boy with the curious initials L.A. seems to be considered right there on the top with the best.

No, for me it was the opposite. For me it was better not to be quite so involved in the temple and have more time and energy for the outside work, which in a way meant just as much and maybe more.

Glaser: Did that keep you from being involved with some of the politics that were going on?

Altman: I don't think we had politics at the temple. The Latin reply "Cui bono" (for whose benefit) describes it best.

Glaser: I know that there was a very unhappy situation with Rabbi Reichert when he made anti-Zionist statements.

Altman: I think Rabbi Reichert was an unhappy man in general. From what I heard, he liked certain people, not necessarily because they were terribly prominent. Luckily, Emmy and I belonged to that category. To give you an example: he would make remarks like, "Oh, the High Holy Days are coming up. I wish they were behind us, that we had done them already." This, of course, is an unimportant thing, but it indicates in some ways his basic attitude was too negative. That indicates an unhappy attitude.

He was a brilliant man, and he had also a number of absolutely fabulous sermons. To judge him by his anti-Zionist stance only is wrong. It was part of the overall spectrum of Jewish attitudes towards Israel. The Jewish people by and large, in the overall, did not appreciate his attitude at all, which I think he changed too. Ultimately I think his was a tragic life, the more to be regretted because he was so outstanding in many ways.

Glaser: You played in churches also; was the relationship between clergy and organist similar to Temple Emanu-El?

Altman: I did indeed play in churches all my life, from 1937-1982. However, these were branches of the Christian Science movement which did not have ministers but rather lay leaders, called first and second readers and changed every few years. There were no choirs but one vocalist, called soloist.

There exists a good relationship between church and synagogue in San Francisco. I was always welcome to play in many different churches, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Catholic, Lutheran, et cetera. And by the same token we at Emanu-El have a Christian choir, as have Sherith Israel. My successor at our Temple, Michael Seccow, a splendid organist and choir conductor, combines his position at St. Mary's the Virgin with the temple.

The situation and position differs in every case, and the title reflects it. The church musician may be called just plain organist, or organist-choir director, or musical director, or minister of music. Prestige and salary depend to some extent on it. Forward-looking religious institutions prefer ambitious, active musicians, even to the point of competitive excellence.

Altman: There the top musician must use tact, and judgment, so as not to outshine the religious hierarchy obviously. [laughter] Perform a little hocus-pocus.

Glaser: What does that mean, hocus-pocus?

Altman: Well, just good judgment.

Glaser: Diplomacy?

Altman: Yes. Diplomacy is a good word for it.

Glaser: When Rabbi Reichert left, Rabbi Alvin I. Fine took his place. Did you have a close relationship with him?

Altman: Yes, a very pleasant one, and there I must say, not only with Alvin Fine but all the rabbis. It was a great help to me that I was lucky to get good reviews on my recitals at the temple, and probably it helped my standing at Emanu-El that members saw me, their organist, on stage year after year.

Glaser: What was Rabbi Fine like as a man?

Altman: Well, when he first came everybody swooned. He was a very handsome young male, not even married, and that first time when he entered the temple, you thought a saint had come. He retained a great deal of that adulation. He had a beautiful speaking voice, a fairly deep voice, and his sermons were spiritual. He made a great success. It was too bad he contracted a heart problem which made him decide to quit the rabbinate. He felt that he couldn't do justice to it. I remember when he spoke to me saying that despite the congregation wanting to keep him under all circumstances, and giving him whatever he wanted, he felt that the congregation deserved someone who could provide total service.

He added, "Ludwig, that might be good enough for somebody else but it is not good enough for me." So that's how he left. I was sorry. He was a very loving and inspiring leader. Like Cantor Rinder he had the gift to lift your spirits in talking to you. You felt reassured in his presence, the proper term is charisma, is it not?

Glaser: It certainly is. Rabbi Irving Hausman followed Rabbi Fine. He was only there for three years.

Altman: If that long. At the most, maybe not even that long. His case was unfortunate because he was a fine, knowledgeable man. He had a strange voice--a voice like I'd never really heard elsewhere. The job is immensely strenuous at the temple, as you can imagine. Some felt it was too strenuous. He got ill, actually, during the High Holy Days and just had to stop conducting and leading the services.

Altman: There were no two ways about it. It was a sad thing because he left a congregation in Sacramento, which evidently he could cover with much less strain. But the Temple Emanu-El was too overwhelming for him. Now it's different because we have more rabbinical personnel--it's more divided. Is it easier now? I don't know. We have more activity than at Rabbi Hausman's time, so it's hard to answer.

Glaser: Yes, there are two assistant rabbis. When Rabbi Asher started in 1968, did you have a closer relationship with him because he was also from Germany like yourself?

Altman: Ultimately the relationship between depends on how well an organist gets along with his cantor. I was fortunate in that both my cantors, Rinder and Portnoy, respected my musical background and general musicianship. However, there was a strong possibility of conflict because the organist may surpass the cantor in strict musical knowledge, putting him or her onto the offensive. The possibility may have prevented many a good musician who is Jewish from becoming a temple organist. Even for so prominent a position as the one at our temple, no Jewish applicant could be found. Three, four times I had hopes to have made a catch--yet each time other professions were chosen by my potential Jewish organists.

As for rabbis, the more interest they have in the music of the opera house and the symphony, particularly chamber music, that is always up the same alley as an organist like me. I am immensely interested in that and really spend much more in the secular side of music than religious music. Then I always have plenty to talk about to a rabbi.

Glaser: Are you saying that there were one or two rabbis who had more of an appreciation for the organ music than others?

Altman: One who had a great deal of appreciation was the late Rabbi [Elliot] Grafman, who was our rabbi only for less than a year. He was immensely interested in the organ. He was retired by then but came to help us. He was with us for about a year, I think.

Glaser: Was he between Rabbi Hausman and Rabbi Asher?

Altman: I think so. And that was, of course, something very special. He was a highly intelligent man who really worked with the organist.

LUDWIG ALTMAN . . . Organist

"One of the greatest organists I have ever heard."
—PIERRE MONTEUX.

INQUIRIES MAY BE SENT TO
OFFICE, TEMPLE EMANU-EL
ARGUELLO AND LAKE STREETS
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Sketch by Antonio Sotomayor

Ludwig Altman, 1937.

Ludwig Altman and the San Francisco Boy's Chorus, circa 1953.

Concert in Civic Auditorium, San Francisco, December 13, 1954. Carman Dragon conducted the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Sponsered by Standard Oil of California -- now Chevron Corporation.

Ludwig Altman, Marc Lavry, Cantor Rinder, Edward Lawton. Stanley Noonan, Louis Heilbron on the occasion of the Premiere of Lavry's Sacred Service. March 11, 1955.

Ludwig Altman and Darius Milhaud

PART II

Ludwig Altman: A Musician's Life

Interviewed by Caroline Crawford

I MUSIC INSTRUCTION IN BRESLAU

[Interview 1: March 3, 1988]##
Interviewer: Caroline Crawford

Crawford: Let us begin by talking about your musical life as a young person. When did you first realize that you wanted to have a life in music?

Altman: I was interested in music as far back as I can remember. My talent was supported from the start by my parents. I remember the old lady who came to the house to give me piano lessons, and I will mention her name, because I think it's the only time the poor woman will be mentioned by anybody! She was Fräulein Preuss; I liked her very much. A gentle soul; a tall woman who was elated to have me as a pupil because I was probably the one star of her life as a piano teacher. She just had beginners, and while I was a beginner then I didn't remain one for too long.

She taught me the fundamentals and I learned to read music and developed rather quickly. That in a way was her undoing, because my mother felt after a while that I had learned everything I could from her and made a change.

Dr. Edmund Nick

Altman: This was a good idea, because my next teacher was Dr. Edmund Nick, a phenomenal musician and, I would say, a genius. He was a composer of some semi-popular music, although he could write

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##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 184.

Altman: serious compositions, too. He liked to work in cabarets, which was a very big thing in Germany at that time, and he had a very famous artistic collaborator, an author named Erich Kästner.

Kästner was one of the most popular authors of the Weimar Republic. He was also antagonistic toward the Nazi regime. When the Nazis came in, he survived mostly because he was not Jewish. Yet he was so disliked by them that they sort of suppressed his writings. Those two men worked together well, and were very successful.

Dr. Nick married the daughter of the president of Silesia, which was a part of Prussia. The capital was Breslau, where I was born. This marriage of Dr. Nick aided him in his career, because the family was of the highest standing in Silesia. His wife, Kaethe, was lovely, a very handsome woman and an excellent soprano. She and her husband gave many song recitals together which were very well received. Dr. Nick was a superb accompanist.

Crawford: Did Dr. Nick compose for the cabarets?

Altman: Yes.

Crawford: Were his compositions for cabaret strongly anti-Nazi? And did he survive?

Altman: They were partially anti-Nazi, and he did survive, yes. Both Dr. Nick and Kästner. I saw Dr. Nick in Munich after the Third Reich was over. He loved to tell about that nightmare.

Let me give you an idea of how idiotic everything done by the Nazis was--unbelievably cruel and horrible. You know that Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream is always given with the music of Mendelssohn, and when the Nazis wanted to give it in Berlin, they would not use that music, because Mendelssohn--the name alone did him in--was a "non-Aryan," to use their vocabulary.

So the top people, I think it was the office of Goebbels, asked Dr. Nick to compose new music for Midsummer Night's Dream. Nick said to me at the time that this was completely crazy, that he could never even approach Mendelssohn, but that he had to obey orders. He needed to be on tolerably reasonable terms with the Nazis because his wife, the daughter of the former president of Silesia, was partly Jewish. Either one of the grandparents or aunts was Jewish, and she needed protection.

Altman: That was all in the beginning of the Nazi regime, when they had just started with their awful measures against the Jews. Later on it was much more severe, but by then I was luckily in the United States.

Crawford: Let's talk about Dr. Nick and his system of teaching piano.

Altman: He was a lousy piano teacher and a marvelous music teacher. As a teacher I was influenced by him. To give you an idea of how he taught, I think I have the book here. He had a list of all the composers whose works I was to study. His idea of teaching was a comprehensive one: that I had to get an overview of music and learn an outstanding composition by each composer so that I had a good general grounding in the history of music.

I profited very much from that, although he never considered the practical aspects too much--for instance, he never had me memorize music. He thought that was not important.

Crawford: He stressed ear development?

Altman: Yes. He wanted that and an understanding of the style of various composers so that I could recognize individual composers just by listening to their music.

After the whole Hitler regime was done with, we saw Dr. Nick in Munich, where he lived. Emmy was with me, and since he was an anti-Nazi he was given very high positions right after the war ended by the Deutsche Bundes Republik. That is the official name of West Germany now.

We saw the Nicks in the 1960s, and when I think of that reunion it brings back a story that moves me just to think about--

I don't know if we did the right thing then or not. They had invited us to their home. We went and met his wife. She suffered from a lung illness which is contagious and we knew it to be contagious, but she said no, we did not have to worry because the doctors told her it was not contagious.

We were both very afraid, and I said to Emmy, "I won't eat anything here." Frau Dr. had prepared a big dish of fresh strawberries with whipped cream, and although I am very fond of those sweets, we didn't want to get ill, and we didn't eat any. She was very insistent that we should have some, and you know they didn't have very much at that time, it was before the material improvements, and we left feeling very badly. We never knew if we did the right thing. Medically, yes, but humanly, perhaps, no.

Crawford: Did you see them again?

Altman: Yes, yes. She died shortly after that first get together, but we saw him several times. They had a daughter whom we also saw several times afterward. She is an author and has many, many books published. I have quite a few of them.

Crawford: I am curious as to why, if he had been overtly anti-Nazi and his wife was Jewish or partly Jewish, they were not bothered by the Nazis.

Altman: Everything was done by law. The Germans are inclined that way and that was in the Nick's favor, because if the law said he was to be left alone, he was left alone.

Crawford: Let's move on then to Mr. von Pozniak. How did you come to him?

Altman: Dr. Nick became very involved during the Weimar Republic. He was put in charge of Silesian broadcasting. In Europe there is only one radio station in a district, all financed by those who purchase radios and are required to pay a monthly fee. As I mentioned, radio is an important institution in Germany.

So he was given charge of the radio in Breslau, which covered the entire province, in the neighborhood of six or eight million people. Breslau had a population of about 640,000.

Dr. Nick was excellent in that job, which was so demanding that he had to kick out all his students except me. He would give me a lesson whenever he had time, but it was very irregular.

When he went on vacation--he liked to go to the sea--he would say, "Ludwig, I'm going to go on vacation. Next time you come, bring me some money." But he never said how much or how little! [laughter]

Whatever I gave him, he was satisfied and invariably he was in good humor the last lesson before a vacation and when he came back he was fresh. And you know, German teachers are not as nice as Americans.

Crawford: More authoritarian?

Altman: Yes, and more given to moods; that was the worst part. Do you know the book Buddenbrooks, by Thomas Mann?

Crawford: Yes.

Altman: You can see this at the very end when he talks about the young fellow, Hanno. That is a description of a typical school in Germany, and to some extent, it is still so.

Crawford: You mentioned before that you were instrumental in Mann's writing in one of his novels.

Altman: Yes. That is almost a chapter in itself.

Crawford: Yes, we should save it for later. For the moment, let's concentrate on your musical education.

Bronislaw von Pozniak

Altman: Yes. My mother particularly felt that I couldn't profit from Dr. Nick any more. He didn't have the time, although he did have the interest, and through his being the head of the radio station in Breslau, he engaged me several times to play short piano recitals on the radio. I have some of the ads and the announcements here. Reviews of recitals I played fifty years ago!

So my mother took me to Bronislaw von Pozniak, the most renowned teacher in Breslau. She was reaching for the highest, I think, because he made his living as a teacher and he only gave four lessons a day. He said it was so strenuous that he could not do justice teaching more than that.

Crawford: Was he a concert artist?

Altman: Well, yes and no. He wanted to be a soloist, and then something terrible happened to him. He forgot the music during one of his recitals, and that you must not do. It scared him so much that he gave up being a soloist and became the pianist in a trio, because there you didn't have to memorize.

He had very good players with him. The cellist, as I told you, was Piatigorsky, who mentions von Pozniak in his short autobiography, My Cello and I.

Crawford: How did his system differ from Dr. Nick's?

Altman: Completely! In the first place, everything had to be ready for performance. Whatever you learned was memorized instantly and performed in public.

If you looked at a score on which Dr. Nick criticized my playing, it was full of very musical notes, and Pozniak did very little of that. He didn't insist on meticulous fingering, but he was a genius in his way; and how he did that I cannot fathom now.

Altman: When I came to him, he said: "I will not teach the boy myself, but I will give him to one of my assistants--to my main assistant." That was a lady who was also acting as his secretary.

But when he heard me play, he said, "No, this one I accept myself right away." And then as he took me he said, "Ludwig, there are two ways you can prepare to reach the heights for which you should prepare yourself. Either you go the long way, point by point, with only exercises now but much more music later on, or the easier way. I give you the bigger things now. Which one do you choose?"

Now he had these old studies that he had prepared in Poland, and I opted for the long way. He was Polish, as I mentioned, but not Jewish, which was remarkable because to be a musician in the eastern countries means usually to be Jewish as well. There are many, many famous ones. I think you know the names: Heifetz; Naoum Blinder, Mischa Elman, Nathan Milstein. Rubinstein, of course.

Crawford: Yes. Were your parents interested in a musical career for you? You were the first son, and that meant a certain entitlement for you as an artist.

Altman: Yes. Well, I always said I was too dumb for anything else but music. [laughs] But my musical interest was so pronounced there was never a question about it.

Crawford: What if you had been a second son?

Altman: That would have been a dilemma!

Arthur Altmann: A Musical Uncle

Crawford: You haven't yet talked about your uncle Arthur, the musical one.

Altman: Well, Uncle Arthur lived in Königsberg, quite far from Breslau, but he came for vacations to us sometimes in the Silesian mountains, which are particularly lovely and very popular. The highest mountain was roughly 1500 meters, about the same as the Black Forest in altitude. It was very popular and we went there all the time to hike and walk.

On one of those rather primitive vacations, my uncle and his wife came and we spoke of nothing but music. He was a Kapellmeister--that is opera conductor--for the opera in Königsberg, and he was also organist at the Hofkirche.

Altman: Hof is "royal," and he taught in a school and also composed. His compositions were well crafted and were good, but he was not avant garde, and never really made it as a composer.

I saw him maybe two times when he came to Silesia. He gave me some scores, and I showed him some of my very early compositions, which were a disgrace. I had done them when I was about fifteen years old. He wrote me that he wanted me to study Wagner's Tristan and Parsifal. Even today Tristan is very modern in its chromaticism, and he wanted me to be more "modern"--I was too old-fashioned even for him! So he gave me the scores of those and other music as well.

The Music and Anti-Semitism of Richard Wagner

Crawford: Do you like Wagner, and did you like to play his works?

Altman: Yes, I love Wagner. Oh, I detest him as a person. He was unbelievable. You know, he wrote all that anti-Semitic junk. That didn't hinder him from being friendly with individual Jews, though, particularly if they could be of service to him at that time.

Crawford: What was the basis of his anti-Semitism?

Altman: It almost cannot be explained. Some time I would like to talk to a psychiatrist about his aversion to the Jewish people, almost a physical aversion. How that can be in a man of phenomenal human insight--

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Altman: If you read the libretto of Die Meistersinger, Wagner had an insight into human nature that is tremendous. He had such understanding of the goodness that can be in man.

Crawford: Hans Sachs.

Altman: Yes, Hans Sachs is such a good person, and he evaluates human nature in such a way--particularly in his monologues. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." It all goes back to the Old Testament.

How a man who has this understanding can be so diametrically different in his diatribes against Jews. He wrote about this twice: First in the 1850s, I think, and once more in the late '60s. It's about Judaism in music, simply Das Judentum in der Musik. I have it right here.

Altman: But I don't have an answer yet, and I really would like to know how those two things can be combined in one brain.

Crawford: Is it nowhere in his music?

Altman: No. It's a totally different man!

Crawford: Doesn't it relate to his philosophy of hierarchy? Gods versus mortals; some sort of super race?

Altman: It might. If there isn't a book about it, there should be one.

More About Bronislaw von Pozniak

Altman: Anyway, back to Pozniak. He made me play at his student recitals and that was like a carrot for me. Before one of these, a student got cold feet, three weeks before the recital, and so Pozniak had an opening he needed to fill. She was supposed to play three of the Moments Musicaux by Schubert, and one couldn't play only three and not all six, so who was the pupil to do the other three?

So Pozniak said to me, "Do you think you can learn these three in three weeks?" I said, "Yes." So I was given that task, and I played them from memory successfully, and I was then a real in-man. I became the "third desk" and the next year I played the St. Francis Legends of Liszt. The best student--an assistant to Pozniak--was Josef Wagner. I have a composition of his here, a very good musician, and there is a love story there.

There was a young lady, a writer, who was in love with a modern dancer, and I was his accompanist in Breslau. He did not return the love of this lady, and as she wanted to make him jealous, she started to flirt with Josef Wagner. But what happened was that these two fell in love with each other! [laughter] They got married. It's the old story.

Anyway, I played the Legends of St. Francis of Liszt the following year and my last year with Pozniak I did the Brahms F minor Sonata, opus 5. Then my mother thought I wouldn't amount to much as a pianist because there were too many talented pianists in Breslau for me to earn a living. She thought it would be much better to get an academic degree and have the possibility to be engaged as a musical employee.

The following excerpt has been translated from Breslauer Zeitung, September 1929 (see marked passages, page 78b).

Ludwig Altmann comes closest to the concept of an artistic interpreter. He already plays the "Legend of St. Francis" with a responsible self-assuredness, i.e., he elevated himself above the subject to come forth with his own style and interpretation. Of course this was not true for Lizst, whose adequate rendition reflected only the flashy facade of the piece. Yet, aside from well-modulated coloration and some flashy moments, there evidenced itself in the playing by Mr. Altmann a sensitivity ready to be developed for poetic penetration of the subject, bringing its content to life through imaginative creativity. With the "Sermon to the Birds," which can easily drift into reproach, as well as with the "Wavepromenade," which is often misinterpreted with elemental surges of power, this interpreter was able to provide a deeper meaning so that the listener remained musically involved and mentally challenged, in spite of the length of the pieces. In view of his young age, such a favorable test should evoke promising hope for the long-term development of Mr. Altmann.

Theater * Musik

Zweiter Reger-Liszt-Abend der Poznial-Schüler

Der Eindruck pianistischer Durchbildung kann von Schülern recht wohl erzielt werden, obwohl sie der sorgsam führenden und fördernden Hand ihres Meisters in Ansehung der „höheren Weihen" der Künstlerschaft längst auch nicht entwachsen sind. So spielte zu Beginn des zweiten Vortrag-Abends Erna Ullrich drei Stücke aus Regers „Tagebuch" (Band I) zwar noch ziemlich einfarbig, auch allzu weich getönt und überempfindungsvoll, als daß man so recht auf den herbgesunden Geschmack dieser brahmsnahen Gebilde hätte geführt werden können, aber dennoch so sauber differenziert im Anschlag und musikalisch so gewissenhaft, daß der klavieristische Reiz an sich genügte, um an der Regerreproduktion Freude zu haben. Zielsicherer in der Gestaltung gab sich bereits Liselotte Riese, die gewählten Stücke aus „Träume am Kamin" erfuhren zum Teil eine dem Inhalt geschickt nachspürende und ihn richtig erfassende Wiedergabe; so das leichtfüßig dahertanzende vierte Stück (E-dur), das kapriziöse zehnte (d-moll), auch das zwölfte, in dem es dem Meister beifiel, der Chopinschen „Berceuse" auf seine Weise nachzuträumen. Aber auch Fräulein Rieses Talent muß noch erstarken, die verhältnismäßig lange Serie ihrer Vorträge, korrekt in den Einzelheiten und pianistisch feinsinnig durchgefühlt, verlief trotzdem noch ohne jene kernige Selbständigkeit in der Plastik, die dem Zarten und Feinen, dem Versonnenen und Traumduftigen haltbare Gestalt und persönlichen Gehalt hätte sichern können. Für den pretentiösen Salonstil Liszts bringt Hubert Schmidt ein tüchtiges pianistisches Rüstzeug mit. „Sonetto 123 del Petrarca" kam außerdem durch ihn recht musikalisch zu Gehör, die letzte Süßigkeit und Schwärmerei hinein- und herauszusingen gelang ihm allerdings nicht, aber nach dem allzu weiblich überhauchten Reger, war man geneigt, seiner mehr objektiv nachzeichnenden als subjektiv gesteigerten Darstellung die innere Berechtigung zuzusprechen. Der „Tarentella" (Venezia e Napoli) mangelte in den eigentlichen Tanzteilen nicht sowohl die virtuose Bravura, als vielmehr die rhythmische Großzügigkeit und die fortreißende Akzentik des Temperaments. Die inmitten liegende „Canzona Napolitana" wußte er elegant und gesangreich aus den Tasten zu holen. Ludwig Altmann steht dem Begriff des künstlerischen Interpreten am nächsten. Er spielt die „Franziskus-Legenden" mit bereits verantwortungsbewußter Selbständigkeit, d. h. also, er steht soweit über der Sache, daß er Eigenes in Stil und Vortrag zur Geltung bringen kann. Ganz sicher beweisführend für diese Meinung ist freilich Liszt nicht, dessen adäquate Wiedergabe allzusehr von den Aeußerlichkeiten einer blendend illuminierten Fassade abhängt. Immerhin bekundete sich im Spiel Herrn Altmanns neben feingestufter Farbigkeit und glanzvoller Beleuchtung ein ausgeschlossener Sinn für großartigen Aufbau, für poetische Durchdringung der Vorwürfe, für phantasiegesteigerte Verlebendigung des Inhalts. Sowohl die „Vogelpredigt", die so leicht ins deskriptiv Tändelnde abirren kann, wie auch die „Wogenpromenade", die so oft zum Paradieren mit elementaren Kraftevolutionen mißbraucht wird, gerieten dem Interpreten zum „schönen Schein" einer tieferen Bedeutung, und so wurde der Hörer, trotz der Länge der Stücke, musikalisch gefesselt und geistig angeregt. Bei seinem jugendlichen Alter darf nach dieser günstigen Erprobung von der ferneren Entwicklung Herrn Altmanns das beste erhofft werden.

Nach dem vielseitig interessierenden, aber schon die Dauer eines Konzertabends völlig aufbrauchenden ersten Teil des Programms und nach einer langgedehnten Pause hatte es Elisabeth Müller mit ihren Liedervorträgen nicht ohne weiteres leicht, die Hörer wieder genußbereit zu stimmen, noch dazu mit der zumeist spröden Kost Regerschen Lyrik. Aber ihrem lebhaft durchgeistigten, sehr musikalischen Vortrag hörte sich's je länger je besser zu. Sie hat neben den Vorzügen einer, wenn auch noch nicht völlig ausgeglichenen, so doch in allen Lagen angenehm ansprechenden und in Mitte und Tiefe ergiebigen Altmezzosopranstimme, das Geheimnis zu eigen, persönlich zu interessieren. Womit noch nicht gesagt ist, daß sie den Gehalt ihrer Vorlagen vollkommen ausgeschöpft hätte. Jedenfalls eine sehr erfreuliche Begabung, die in der ferneren Hut ihrer Meisterin, Frau Nick-Joenicke, sich hoffentlich bis zur Künstlerschaft entwickeln wird. Fräulein Müller wurde pianistisch fein und anschmiegsam begleitet von Herbert Weiß.

Die abschließende „Sonata h-moll" von Liszt habe ich nicht mehr abgewartet. Joseph Wagner, dem der Vortrag zugefallen war, hat mir schon einmal vor etwa zwei Jahren mit dem gleichen Werk einen überzeugenden Eindruck von seinem Können vermittelt. Inzwischen ist er mit eigenen Abenden mehrfach hervorgetreten, sodaß ihn nochmals im Rahmen einer Schüler-Veranstaltung zu beurteilen, mir nicht angängig erscheinen wollte.

P. Pl—nn.

Breslauer Zeitung (Sept 29)

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Altman: So the idea was to go to Berlin, because the University there was fabulous, and the State Academy for Church and School Music would teach me the right music, so that I could because a teacher of music in the public schools.

So I went to Berlin. Von Pozniak took that very badly. He had a fit.

Crawford: He wanted you to be a pianist.

Altman: Yes, and stay with him until I was ready.

Crawford: You had gotten very good reviews for your playing in Breslau.

Altman: Yes, definitely. Von Pozniak had taught me some of the great pieces. I could play the Brahms Sonata and the Appassionata and Emperor Concerto of Beethoven, the E-flat major Concerto of Liszt. All the blockbusters. He was crazy, because where would I ever play them? But I must say that he insisted on getting a really first-class technique, and whatever I still have from those glorious years when I was doing all those numbers, I owe to him.

Crawford: You did a lot of those big virtuoso pieces. I know you did the Widor and other great French works.

Altman: Yes, that was a particularly difficult one, but I could play them all, piano music and later the organ stuff, as well as his Emperor Concerto.

Musical Training and Experience in Breslau*

Altman: As I always loved the scholarly side of music, I became an eager student of German languages and of musicology at the University of Breslau. The Music Department was small, perhaps a handful of professors and instructors; all however of high quality and fine reputation. The head of the department was a Dr. Arnold Schmitz, a young, up-to-date and interesting musician, who to his discredit became later an ardent supporter of the Nazi regime. After the war he became a professor again, this time at the University of Mainz.

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*This section was inserted by Mr. Altman when he reviewed his interview.

Altman: Of even much greater influence on me was an instructor in the Breslau Music Department, Dr. Peter Epstein. His modest title was Privatdozent (private tutor). I participated in his seminars and attended his classes. At this particular time the study of Renaissance music was in vogue, which meant that we had to learn to read and to perform music in all the different clefs of the notation of that time. It was a genuine compliment when Dr. Epstein told me not to come any more since I knew all the clefs and was able to sight-read and even to transpose them. He honored me further when he invited me to his home (he was married and they had a lovely baby). Unfortunately, he died young in 1932 of cancer. I own some of his brilliant writings, which I cherish.

You can see how my early and deep experiences go back to school days, to the twenties. How well I remember Pablo Casals in his prime then, playing one of the two Brahms Sonatas; or the debut of the young Vladimir Horowitz with the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto, a performance which made him famous overnight. Or the recital of the truly legendary Russian bass Chaliapin, an overwhelming experience remembered today in detail, some sixty-five years later. There was no program prepared since Chaliapin chose his selections spontaneously. The poor accompanist, who had to shlepp the entire repertoire on stage! There was, of course, the popular "The Flea" by Moussorgsky and the Leporello aria from Don Giovanni.

The Symphony Orchestra of Breslau was just routine, although there were quite a number of fine individual players. The conductor was Georg Dohrn, a good musician and pianist but only so-so a conductor. It was all government-supported and everybody had tenure. Guest conductors shook up the orchestra occasionally, a welcome event. Imagine how thrilled I was in hearing a visiting ensemble, like the Berlin Philharmonic under Erich Kleiber and even more impressive the Vienna Philharmonic under the legendary (again that word) Felix Weingartner. The program as played: Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, Strauss' Don Juan, and at the end Schumann's First Symphony. I had enough courage, or you may call it overpowering curiosity, to ask one of the musicians why the modestly orchestrated Schumann was placed as the final piece after the more flamboyant other numbers. The reason given was that only the Schumann ended fortissimo, thus eliciting the strongest applause.

Like the symphony so was the opera fairly uneven in its achievements and at its best when guests sang, like the famous tenor Leo Slezak as Tamino, or Richard Mayr as Ochs. Some works were given the same way at the same time. So at the opera, which played no less than ten months a year, there was Wagner's Parsifal, and at Easter there was Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. Finally, let me reminisce as to how moved I was in hearing the

Altman: then first Breslau performance of Bach's last towering masterpiece, The Art of the Fugue. This was a performance that marked the absolute highlight of my life as a musician when many years later I could sparkplug and indeed arrange for the work to be given for the first time here in its entirety at my Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, with a chamber orchestra of players from the San Francisco Symphony, I playing organ and Jan Popper conducting.**

**End of insert.

II THE BERLIN YEARS; THE STATE ACADEMY OF CHURCH AND SCHOOL MUSIC

The Entrance Examination

Crawford: How about the examination that you took for the Academy?

Altman: For the State Academy of Church and School Music you had to pass an examination. After high school, when you are seventeen or eighteen, you pass a final examination before the school releases you with a diploma. With that diploma you can enter any university in any discipline you choose.

For the examination you had to play, you had to sing, and they were demanding in musical dictation, so you had to have a very good ear.

Crawford: Did you have to set a chorale?

Altman: Yes. We had a very famous teacher, Max Seiffert, who had many of his editions published, a famous man. He was uneffective and uninspiring as a teacher. I can still remember the ear test they gave me. Would you like to hear it?

Crawford: Yes.

Altman: It's unbelievable that I still remember it after so many years. But I do, because the ear test was so crucial for admission. [Goes to piano and plays series of notes] We had to write that down after hearing it three times.

About 160 students wanted to be admitted but only thirty were taken. In all honesty, since I am supposed to be honest, I have to admit that I was not in the first group of candidates admitted, but only in the second batch.

Altman: I took the examination in January, 1930. The first group started in the spring, the second, to which I belonged, began in the fall of 1930.

This was nice because I went back to Breslau to study some more with von Pozniak and play in his student recital in the early fall of 1930.

Crawford: Where was the best institution to be found?

Berlin University and the Hochschule für Musik

Altman: The University taught scientific subjects in music, like the history of musical notation in which the celebrated Johannes Wolf gave a seminar every Saturday morning.

Or the seminars of Arnold Schering, who was also the Ordinarius (head of department), or Friedrich Blume, who was to become the leading musicologist of Germany. Of the three men I liked Wolf the most because he opposed the Nazis and kept his friendships with his Jewish colleagues such as Alfred Einstein. Schering fell for the Nazis the hardest.

By contrast, the Hochschule für Musik trained highly talented singers and instrumentalists to become outstanding performers in their respective fields. In all fields except the organ. Organ was taught at the State Academy of Church and School Music.

Of course, musical matters overlapped. Some organ students were instructed at the Hochschule, while some classes of Professor Kurt Sachs in the history of musical instruments--his specialty--were given at the Academy.

Remembering Richard Strauss and Some Great Conductors

Crawford: You were exposed to and worked with some of the greatest conductors of the time. What were your impressions of Furtwängler, Klemperer, and others?

Altman: I heard many of them as guest conductors from other towns. For instance, I heard a performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony when the legendary Karl Muck brought the Hamburg Philharmonic to Berlin. I remember Fritz Busch from Dresden and I still remember how he had Alfred Cortot play the Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor.

Altman: I remember many Furtwängler performances. He was a very strange man, and he almost hypnotized people. You know, a concert in Germany is more like celebrating music, like a religious service. There was an aura of something beyond the music, and a man like Furtwangler elicited that feeling.

He cast a spell over the orchestra and audience. Technically he was not the strongest conductor. Last year the Leipzig Orchestra came here with the German conductor Kurt Masur, and it was an experience like this.

Still, we don't have that here so much; it's more prosaic I would say.

Crawford: What about Richard Strauss?

Altman: You know, Strauss was a matter-of-fact composer. His adversary in Germany was Hans Pfitzner, who was given to jealousy and self-aggrandizement and he envied Strauss his great success.

It had taken Pfitzner many years to compose an opera, and Strauss could do it in as many months, and Strauss would say, "If composing is so hard for him, why does he do it?"

I heard him in an afternoon concert at the Opera Unter der Linden, conducting Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony and then his Zarathustra. He did the Beethoven 1-2, 1-2, without much emotion, but then he did his own piece much better, after he warmed up. It was the State Opera Orchestra. There was always the joke going around about Strauss conducting "eine Mark, zwei Mark, drei Mark, vier Mark..."

Crawford: Counting his money...

Altman: He was really that way! He wrote when the Nazis came that he opposed their policies because he wanted people to come to his concerts, and he wanted to play music by Jews, Bavarians, et cetera. He said it was all the same to him. But then he went over quickly. His royalty checks were important.

He was interested in receiving his royalties and having a large attendance for his opera and concert performances. He even expressed this mixture of benevolence towards the Jews with his desire for lucrative compromise in a letter to Stefan Zweig.

Crawford: He collaborated?

Altman: Yes. Not that he advocated their policies, but he did have a reason [to protect his family] because his daughter was Jewish, Fräulein Graf from Prague. When his son, Franz married her, her famous father-in-law, in fact, became her protection.

III NAZISM AND ITS EFFECT ON MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Crawford: Who continued to play and perform during the Nazi years? I know Toscanini and others refused to do it.

Altman: Many of the great conductors of the time would not conduct in Germany, men like Fritz Busch, or Erich Kleiber. Many musicians lost their jobs right away as being "Nicht-Aryan."

For strictly personal reasons I would like to mention the case of the cellist Josef Schuster. He was the regular cellist in the trio of Bronislaw von Pozniak, and without notifying Pozniak about his intentions, Schuster was negotiating with the Berlin Philharmonic, where Furtwängler wanted him as principal cellist.

Finally Schuster broke the news to Pozniak, who hit the ceiling and Schuster had to endure a tongue-lashing, which he certainly deserved.

Accepting the position in Berlin, Schuster became one of the musicians for whom Furtwängler stood up, trying his best to keep up but failing in this. Schuster left Germany in time to become principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic. Later he moved to California as a freelancing soloist.

The real fight in the Nazi regime over German music focused on the music of Paul Hindemith, Germany's "modern" leading composer. By and large Hindemith's music was disliked by the public as too dissonant, too little melody, too much noise. Sounds familiar, does it not? The only difference was that here we can play it unhindered; in Germany one risked one's livelihood in speaking up for Hindemith. This is exactly what Furtwangler did when he conducted Hindemith's Mathis, der Maler and got tumultuous applause from the Berlin audience. I was there, yes, I was there; it was marvelous.

Unfortunately, neither Strauss nor Furtwängler prevailed. Their activities ceased for a while, after which they made, with the regime, a compromise indeed. While Strauss remained in

Altman: Germany, composing and conducting as if nothing had happened, Hindemith left the country, landing in the United States as a professor at Yale. In returning to Europe, he settled in French Switzerland where he died and was buried in a small cemetery in a village above Lac Leman.

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Crawford: Were the orchestras denuded when the Jewish musicians had to leave?

Altman: Yes. But there are always more musicians than get jobs; that is an old story.

By the way, the Jews who left went to Palestine, where the first Jewish orchestra was founded. The ones who helped do that were Bronislav Hubermann, the famous violinist, and Fritz Kreisler, considered the finest violinist of the time, and Toscanini; whose three men were instrumental in founding the Palestine-Israeli Philharmonic.

Crawford: How did Toscanini get involved in that?

Altman: As a humanitarian. He was motivated not to conduct any longer in Bayreuth, and he was one of the few not to do it any more because of fascism and because he knew the Jewish people were in dire need.

Crawford: So Toscanini and Furtwängler really stand out as taking stands against Nazism.

Altman: Absolutely. Although Toscanini much more than Furtwängler.

I heard Furtwängler conduct Berlioz's Harold in Italy, which has a famous part for viola, and the violist was Paul Hindemith, at the Berlin Philharmonic, and I will never forget that. Since then Harold in Italy is one of my favorites.

Getting Assigned to the High Holy Days Services and the Synagogue

Altman: In 1933, with the advent of the Nazis, it became clear to a number of us young musicians in our middle twenties that our careers would be truncated because of the anti-Jewish laws which started to be given out right away. A number of us switched over to become organists, because there were always synagogues in Germany that needed organ players and always had had Christians

Altman: play for religious reasons because Jewish people of the old faith are not supposed to work on the Sabbath, Friday evening and Saturday. So the organists were largely non-Jewish people.

During the Hitler regime, they largely gave up their positions, and so there was a need. Berlin had about 172,000 Jewish inhabitants at that time, and the first step was to participate in a preparatory course given by the Jewish people every spring to train enough organists, choir singers and choir directors, cantors and even rabbis to take the High Holy Days services, which were given every fall in synagogues, halls, and even movie houses to accommodate all the people who wanted to participate in the High Holy Days services.

In 1933 I took the course and the examination at the end of the course. Depending on how well you did in the examination you were assigned to those many extra services. You must remember that the religious organizations were different from what we know here. Here if you are rich you can buy a lot and erect a synagogue, and nobody will hinder you, even if it's only the whim of a rich man. He can fulfill it.

Not so in Europe. The Jewish people there are all under one central office. This office would assign who would sing, or who would preach, or who would be assigned to a specific synagogue. There were fourteen very large ones; seven were liberal and seven conservative. The seven liberal ones had mixed choirs, a cantor, and an organist. The orthodox synagogues had only male choirs, no organ and a cantor besides the rabbi, of course.

The goal was to be so good that one would eventually get a job at one of the liberal synagogues. The first step in that direction was getting a job for the High Holy Days, when so many extra players would be needed. So I took the examination in 1933, and I was judged good enough to be given an organ job in one of the movie houses of Berlin, in the north of Berlin where the laboring man lived, and it had every stop under the sun.

I wanted to be well thought of because I wanted to get a regular job with the Jewish community, and at that time there was no thought that the Nazi situation would end up in a holocaust. Whenever the Nazis had a law against the Jews, people thought, "Now, that's enough. Hitler has now punished enough, and he will calm down, and we will survive." It developed gradually, and eventually it was so bad that no one could survive it. But at the beginning, all the rabbis and the top people thought Hitler was a passing phase and the good days would return. It was <u>unthinkable</u> what happened.

Altman: So in the early days it was perfectly logical for a young fellow to want to prove himself as a very fine organist, get a permanent position, and eventually do very well. Not very well, because it was not well paid, but anyway it was a permanent job.

So in 1933 I was given that job in a movie house and my choir director was unfortunately not very musical--he was dreadful. They also rented the Philharmonic Hall and the Beethovensaal for the extra services; all the extra halls that they could rent, incidentally. They needed for every service one or two cantors, usually two, and a choir.

Anyway, my choir director made me play loud, because he said Berlin people only like music that is loud. That was very strange to me, and whenever I rehearsed, he said, "Altman, play louder!" And I pulled stop after stop until there weren't any stops left, and he still said, "Can't you play louder?"

I said, "Herr Vogel, the only thing left now is thunder and lightning."

Well, he was suspicious, and he said: "You know what we'll do? Whenever I give you a special signal with my left hand, you play thunder and lightening." So whenever he did that, I kicked in the air, and he was very happy!

Crawford: You didn't give him thunder and lightning--

Altman: No. It would have ruined the service. [laughter]

Crawford: You have thunder and lightning at the Legion of Honor, too.

Altman: Yes! Then later on I ran into the cantor for that occasion who had escaped the Nazis and become a prominent cantor in Detroit and he asked me if I knew why Herr Vogel made me do that. I said if I thought about it I probably thought he was hard of hearing. "Oh, no," he said, "for some reason he didn't like cantors, and he used you to drown me out!"

Herr Vogel had a small conservatory of music in a lesser part of Berlin, and for some reason two of the sons in the Royal House of Hohenzollern took music lessons at that conservatory on the mouth organ, and so Herr Vogel had a direct line to the House of Emperor William the Second.

Crawford: From there you went on to the synagogue.

Altman: Yes, the next year I got an unbelievable opportunity in that I was given the best and greatest of those extra places. Not the synagogue but the services in the Philharmonic Hall.

Künstlerhilfe der jüdischen Gemeinde

in Gemeinschaft mit der jüd. **Chor- und Orchestervereinigung**

Neue Synagoge Oranienburger Str. 30

Dienstag, den 11. Dezember 1934
abends 20 Uhr pünktlich

SAMSON ORATORIUM VON F. G. HÄNDEL

Dirigent: **Leo Kopf**

Ausführende:
Jüdische Chorvereinigung — Jüdische Orchestervereinigung

Solisten:

Paula Lindberg (Alt)
Hilda Lind (Sopran)
Alice Hannes (Sopran)

Israel Alter (Tenor)
Julius Peissachowitsch (Bariton)
Fritz Lechner (Baß)

Am Flügel: Gertrud Marcus — An der Orgel: Ludwig Altmann

Die Saaltüren werden erst ca. 20⁵⁰ wieder geöffnet. — Während der Aufführung kein Einlaß

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Das Ende der Pause wird durch vier Orgelaccorde angezeigt.

Voranzeige

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April 1935
Erstaufführung in Berlin
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von Ferdinand Hiller
(ausgeführt durch die jüdische Chor- und Orchestervereinigung)

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Altman: It seems unbelievable to me that in 1934 I played the entire Jewish liturgy in the Berlin Philharmonic Hall, the most prominent hall, and I was only about twenty-three years old, very inexperienced, and much more confident than I should have been.

The only difficulty was that we had two cantors, because they have to sing endlessly, and for one everything had to be transposed upward, and for the other, downward, so I had to be able to play the entire liturgy in every key.

But as a job that was a tremendous improvement, and then in 1935 I got one of the regular temples as an organist. And in 1936, my last year in Germany, I was for a year the main organist in a regular synagogue, the biggest synagogue (in Oranienburger-strasse). I made it straight to the top, and there was no harrassment in 1936. [This was the Neue Synagoge.]

Nazi Harrassment

Crawford: Let's talk about that.

Altman: In the beginning it was bad, but these were the good days by comparison. Because of the Olympic Games in 1936 the Nazis tried to soft-pedal the persecution of the Jewish people, which had started but was not so obviously visible at that time.

The Jewish people had to be eliminated from the cultural life of Germany, and they lost all their positions; they could no longer be doctors, or judges, or lawyers; they could no longer be attached to any school, and that started right away in 1933. So the Jews were pushed together into their own lives and social activities.

In 1933, they started what I just described, that the Jewish people lost their positions in all fields and were only permitted to express and practice their work with their fellow Jews. You could still be a lawyer or a doctor, but you could not have an "Aryan" client, to put it bluntly. The "Aryan" population were told not to buy from a Jew or go into Jewish stores, and on certain days, like April 1, 1933, there was smashing of windows in all Jewish stores. I was there, and I witnessed it. Pictures were taken if people went into those stores, and it was dangerous.

Then it subsided a little, because Hjlmar Schacht told Hitler that if it continued, Germany would lose all foreign trade, which would not be in the interest of the German Reich. But, of course, you could see the handwriting on the

Altman: wall, and the situation gradually went from bad to worse. And then when Hindenburg died there was no holding onto sanity any more. But in 1936 it was better for a while.

At that time I learned English from a Polish woman who spoke it perfectly. We would walk through the streets of Berlin, and she would speak to me, and I would say, "yes, yes." That was enough to make us very attractive to the loitering youth of Berlin. They heard us speaking and thought, "Oh, they must be foreigners," something wonderful for them. We were constantly imposed upon to give our autographs! Here we were at the bottom of the pile, but they knew us only as foreign-speaking, foreigners, and we were followed with great admiration.

That girl got out, too, fortunately, and she might still be alive in New York. I don't know.

In the spring of 1933, quite a number of cultural leaders in Germany got together and I belonged to that group, not because of any merit, but because I had acquired another activity within the Jewish circle, namely, that I was music critic of the largest Jewish-German weekly, the Central Verein Zeitung, Yes, that's right.

The Kulturbund

Altman: I will never forget a meeting, held by Kurt Singer, who was by the way a medical doctor (a hematologist) and a marvelous musician--he had charge of one of the opera houses in Berlin for a time. You know that Berlin in my student days had three opera houses playing for the whole year. There was the State Opera Unter den Linden, the Kroll Opera under the direction of Klemperer, and the third was the Berlin City Opera, Bismarck-strasse, which was in the 1920s under the guidance of Bruno Walter, and at times of Kurt Singer, the top man or intendant.

Well, at that meeting, Dr. Singer said that if we Jews did not combine forces we would run in all directions, each one by himself. He suggested we make a Kulturbund, one cultural organization, that we cooperate and work together. He said, "My prediction is that we will have to do that for three years"--that was a very long time then--"and my prediction is that after that time Hitler will have gone the way of all the others and the whole thing will have normalized."

Altman: So the Central Verein Zeitung became prominent all of a sudden because it was the main organ of the largest organization of Jews in Germany.

Before it was insignificant, and now it became the biggest journal of the German Jews. So I started to write numberless reviews of operas, symphonies, all kinds of orchestral ensembles, lectures, recordings, and longer articles on anniversaries, et cetera.

Crawford: Was your synagogue work full-time?

Altman: No. A synagogue job for an organist is never full-time. Most churches don't pay full-time either. Maybe one in twenty-five.

Even at Temple Emanu-El I was never expected to spend too much time. As a matter of fact, I did not want to be paid too much because it would obligate me to spend too much time there; I wanted to be free for outside musical work and play secular music, as I did with the symphony.

Anyway, that was the Kulturbund, and it was extended all over Germany, so that the smaller Jewish communities got some musical activities, and it helped the morale a great deal.

Crawford: Practically speaking, how was it organized?

Altman: We were very well organized. We had good communications and we could travel freely. Several times I was sent Kulturfahrten--that means tours, to smaller Jewish communities, usually with a singer or a recitant and an accompanist who would play the organ or the piano or the harmonium. I went on many of those, particularly in Prussia.

Crawford: Did these have political implications?

Altman: Yes. The Kulturbund was given its own theater in Berlin by the Nazi regime, which was hard to understand. On the one hand they suppressed us, enslaved us, and eventually killed us, but until almost the very end they insisted that we have this Berlin theater for our very own use and that we play in it--a theater about the size of the Curran Theatre.

Now what was the reason for that contradictory behavior? There were two reasons in my opinion. The first one was that they wanted to convince foreigners of their humanity toward the Jewish people. On the one hand the Germans did those horrible things and on the other they still wanted to impress the world that they were humanitarians towards us. Unbelievable that shortly before the concentration camps they would invite representatives from nations of the Red Cross to review those

Altman: camps. They would dress them up for one day like a Viennese cafe, so that the foreigners would think we had a good life, our afternoon coffees, and all that.

The other thing is that the supervision of these activities gave good jobs to topnotch Nazis. There was one man very high up named Hans Hinkel, who was the Nazi representative of all cultural endeavors. He was very visible. I knew him and he had a special box at the theater, where he would go at liberty, and he reported on us to the Nazis. But it's hard to understand, isn't it?

Crawford: Did it cause people to overlook the seriousness of the situation?

Altman: Yes, that's correct.

Crawford: You said before that the Nazis wanted simply to get the Jewish people out of the system, not to exile them.

Altman: The country too. You know the German Jews were largely assimilated and addicted to culture. You know it from Kurt Adler. He is just one of many; they are all more or less that way. We were imbued with German culture. That was the strange thing.

The culture of Germany/Austria was so marvelous. You know the music we admire is nine-tenths German. If you take that away, what's left?

Crawford: Italian opera!

Altman: Not for me! [laughter]

Crawford: I read your article about the composers and their longing or lack of longing, and about Verdi and Puccini--

Altman: Oh, yes. I admire them very much and I know better than that. But that is the general idea, and somehow they felt they had to cut off the Jews from German culture. They felt that German music would strengthen the Jews too much, and they should not play or sing it any more.

But in the beginning there was no such stricture, and it is characteristic that early on all of the operas given were German: Figaro, Fidelio. Later on the Nazis didn't permit that any more; they had to be Jewish. You could still give an oratorio of Mendelssohn, for example, but you could not give a work by Wagner. They wanted to control us, and also the choice of drama.

But the Nazis supported the Kulturbund because they wanted it as a showpiece for foreigners.

Crawford: By law you couldn't play German music; could you perform Bach in the synagogue?

Altman: You probably could, because they didn't announce it. Actually, the test piece for anyone who wanted to get an organ job in the synagogues was the Toccata and Fugue in D minor by Bach. Everybody had to play that.

But, you know, the strangeness comes form the fact that on the one hand they wanted to destroy us and on the other they insisted that we make a success of our culture so that we could show on the outside that we were well off.

It is true that in 1935, two years after Hitler came to power, we Jews could go to a concert or opera performance in "our" Berlin theater; everybody was Jewish, and we would check our overcoats and umbrellas--in Europe, you can't take those into the theater and that is still the rule today--and we would go there. Our overcoats were still good and they hadn't worn out yet and we looked like a respectable group of people who had nothing in the world to worry about. That was the impression we gave.

Crawford: Did the Nazis subsidize the Jewish community? They gave you a theater, but was there support for the arts?

Altman: No, I doubt that. But that we got a theater at all was something wonderful.

Working as a Music Critic

Crawford: Would you talk in some depth about your work in journalism and reviewing?

Altman: Well, it came easily to me, because my handling of the German language at that time was very good. When I show those reviews, people never believe that I was so young; I was only about twenty-two when I started reviewing those programs. I got quite a few compliments, and today, after quite a long life, I would almost say that that was my strongest suit, being a music critic and music reviewer, and under normal conditions in Germany, I would have followed that as my career. Before the Nazis came, I had made the right contacts, and I wanted to break into that field as a Berlin correspondent to places outside of Berlin.

Crawford: Was that a position that had a lot of status in Germany?

Altman: It was, yes. It depended on what you wrote and if you got the right papers. It took a little while to break in because you had to make the right contacts, and in Germany that is more difficult than here, yet theoretically possible.

The most difficult thing here, if you are a singer, would be to get an audition with Kurt Herbert Adler or Mr. McEwen or whoever is on top, but it is possible, comparatively easy. But in Europe, no. To get an audition with any big shot is, for an unknown person, almost impossible. If you do have an in, it means more in Europe. Let's say that if somebody knew you well, an old school friend who could make the connection, it would be very meaningful and important. More so than here.

It took a while for me to make the right contacts, but that is what I really wanted to do, be a correspondent of cultural affairs for the out-of-Berlin press.

Crawford: And you had a good start on that career.

Altman: I did, excellent. But then at the end when the Nazis stopped everything, even their own symphony orchestras went under in the last year of the war, and then all this collapsed at the same time.

Crawford: Did you write for the non-Jewish press?

Altman: No, those were all Jewish papers.

Crawford: And were they in trouble before you left Germany?

Altman: No, they were still going, but a year or two later they all stopped. I lived for four years under Nazi rule in Berlin, and the reason I was not personally hit too badly was that all my professional and economic life was within the Jewish community and I was not paid anything by the non-Jewish community.

The second thing, and this sounds funny, is that I was once a blond-haired young fellow who looked non-Jewish, and I hate to say it, but it was almost a benefit. It was better to be this way because you were not attacked by anyone. Strange ramifications.

For instance, whenever two people met, they were supposed to give the Hitler salute, "Heil Hitler!" On the other hand, within the Jewish community, giving the salute was repulsive; it could be construed as a travesty even. If you didn't give the Hitler salute and other Nazis stood around you, they could hurt you, yell at you. On the other hand, if you did salute, and another person who knew about your being Jewish saw, you would be in trouble, too.

Crawford: How did you handle that?

Altman: I didn't. I always hoped for the best.

Crawford: Let me go back to something you said before. You said that during the Depression there was a great need for music criticism. Why was that?

Altman: Well, I meant it this way. The Depression was general. If you said, "I am a violinist and I can play the Tschaikovsky Concerto, or whatever," they would say, "Well, we have already twenty-five people who can play that." Everything was overcrowded.

The Depression we experienced in the late 1920s comprised all endeavors in musical life also. An opera orchestra would have forty members, but the Depression meant that nobody had jobs, nobody had money, and they could cut down the orchestra so that one year it would be only twenty-five and that was in my opinion the wrong approach to the problem. But if you were a writer who could write under the feuilleton idea, they always needed to fill this space, and it was constantly being renewed. The newspaper had to have the political, economic, cultural news.

Musical Life During the Weimar Republic

Crawford: You've said that the musical life during the Weimar Republic was unequalled. How would you compare that era with, say, New York now?

Altman: The music in New York is overrated, because not that many people go. The percentage is not that high, and we sometimes forget that. We have more cultural activity in San Francisco percentage wise. The number of people who attend here is greater percentagewise than in New York.

But in Berlin--you know, we had the three operas I mentioned to you and Otto Klemperer did many marvelous modern things. A lot of Stravinsky and the renaissance of the Handel operas took place at the same time. There were many wonderful things. They did Wozzeck with Erich Kleiber conducting at the Theater Unter den Linden and Darius Milhaud's Christopher Columbus at the State Opera in Unter den Linden, when those were very daring.

Crawford: But people came?

Altman: Oh, yes. But then in the Depression I think the Kroll Opera was closed altogether.

Altman: So that's it, but the thing I cannot still reconcile in my mind is the duplicity of orders from the highest top to down underneath. Did we bring that out pretty well?

Decision to Leave Germany

Crawford: Yes, I think so. But I would like to ask when you realized you couldn't remain as a Jewish musician in Germany. Before your uncle left?

Altman: Well, my uncle Bruno left and was caught in France. He was the younger brother of my father. I never found out what happened to the older brother, my uncle Arthur, the musician.

Vorstand der Jüdischen Gemeinde

96a

Berlin N 24, den 30. November 19 36
Oranienburger Str. 29

E/Gr Tagebuch-Nr. II

Es wird ersucht, vorstehende Tagebuch-Nr. bei Beantwortung dieses Schreibens anzugeben.

Wir bescheinigen hierdurch, dass

Herr Ludwig A l t m a n n

seit einigen Jahren in verschiedenen Synagogen unserer Gemei als Organist tätig gewesen ist. Seit einiger Zeit ist ihm das Organistenamt an unserer Neuen Synagoge, Oranienburgerstr. übe tragen worden.

Mit einem gesunden Musikempfinden ausgestattet und un terstützt durch ein gediegenes Orgelstudium, hat Herr Altmann den musikalischen Teil des Gottesdienstes durch seine künstle rischen Qualitäten gehoben und durch sein gutes Einfühlungsve mögen in die jüdische Kultmusik die Andacht weihevoll gestalt Seine Anpassungsgabe hat ihn besonders befähigt, den kantoral Teil des Gottesdienstes in musikalisch abgerundeter Form dar bieten. Herr Altmann, dem in der Orgel der Neuen Synagoge ei der grössten Orgeln Berlins anvertraut worden ist, hat sich a zuverlässiger und versierter Organist nicht nur bei den Gotte diensten, sondern auch in ganz ausgezeichneter Weise bei den von uns veranstalteten Synagogenkonzerten erwiesen und hat da bei schwere Orgelkompositionen mit anerkennenswertem künstle schen Geschick zur Aufführung gebracht.

Herr Altmann verlässt das Amt auf eigenen Wunsch. Wi glauben sicher, dass jede Gemeinde, der er als Organist angeh ren wird, in ihm eine wertvolle Kraft gefunden haben wird.

DER VORSTAND DER JÜDISCHEN GEMEINDE ZU BERLIN * 5610 *

Vorstand der Jüdischen Gemeinde.
Kultusverwaltung

BOARD OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY Berlin, November 30, 1936

We here by certify that:

Mr. Ludwig Altmann

has been employed as organist for a number of years in several synagogues of our community for. Some time ago he was given the post of organist in our New Synagogue, Oranienburgerstr.

Because of his feeling for music, and helped by thorough studies of the organ, Mr. Altmann has been able to lift the artistic level and by his ability to incorporate his sensitivity for sacred Jewish music he was able to create an uplifting service. Especially his ability to get along with people made it possible for him to enrich the caontoral part of the service. Mr. Altman, has proven himself as an accomplished organist on the organ at the Oranienburgerst. synagogue, one of the largest in Berlin, and as a reliable and experienced organist not only in the religious service but also in synagogue concerts where he demonstrated his artistic talent in noteworthy performances of difficult organ compositions.

Mr. Altman is leaving his post on his own request. We feel sure, that any community in which he will be active as an organist will find in him a valuable asset.

Board of the Jewish Community

IV COMING TO AMERICA

[Interview 2: March 29, 1988] ##

Crawford: Let us begin with your decision to leave Germany and discuss how you finished your work at the synagogue in Berlin.

Altman: It was difficult in the beginning because if you were living in Germany under Hitler and were Jewish you were thrown in two directions at the same time.

First, we like to stay where we are if we are reasonably successful and satisfied and happy. On the other hand, there was a growing threat, first to our livelihood and later on to our life, which was extinguished for all those Jewish people who stayed too long.

That was where the conflict was in our own soul. Did I want to leave? Is it very necessary that I do so, and if I leave can I do so successfully? This was particularly poignant in my case, because I was able in 1933 to shift my activity in such a way that I worked as a Jewish musician and did not feel the full impact of the catastrophe that was impending.

I must say that my mother was among those who particularly urged me and my sister to leave Germany, which she did at about age fifteen. She left Breslau for Palestine, and I took her to the train in Berlin together with my mother. It was difficult, because the British were very antagonistic toward any large immigration into Palestine, and so it was considered a stroke of good luck to get a visa to go there. But she did, and then later I went to the United States.

It was difficult to get into the United States, but fortunately I had relatives in San Francisco who sent the necessary papers--it was called an affidavit--and so it was possible for me to come here.

Altman: I left Germany in December of 1936 on a very pleasant British boat called the Georgic via Holland and London, where I visited school friends from the Gymnasium, and arrived in New York January 7th or 8th, 1937. It was a rather stormy voyage, and the New York celebration found all of us in our bunks because we were all seasick.

But the next day it was better and we all enjoyed the trip. I came to New York, where I was greeted by some older friends who had to meet the boat, because you couldn't leave the boat unless you had friends to pick you up.

A Call from Carnegie Hall

Altman: My first night I spent in New Rochelle, where my very good friends Alfred and Rose Zadig lived. It was a good introduction, and I was overwhelmed by the hospitality and the kindliness and wonderful feelings of these American friends. This was, by the way, on a Thursday, and on the first Sunday I almost had the chance to play the organ for religious services at Carnegie Hall, no less!

This came about in the following way: The most important man, musically speaking, among the Jewish people in New York was Abraham Binder. He was a very good musician and a sort of reformer of Jewish liturgy and he wrote many compositions, most of them for the Jewish services.

Binder served as the "musical director" of the Free Synagogue. The Free Synagogue is a large religious institution in New York and he as director was very prominent. He was also a politician, a macher (Jewish expression), and you must understand that there were almost two million Jewish people, and so to be a big shot meant quite a bit of renown.

His organist got sick all of a sudden, a Mr. Richardson who was a very fine man, and Binder, who had heard me play, said, "Ludwig, you better be ready on Sunday morning to play in Carnegie Hall if Mr. Richardson does not recuperate in time." So I was ready for that; I got goose pimples and stage fright! [laughs]

Crawford: What an arrival!

Altman: Yes, what an arrival--I had really never played on an American organ, and you know how different organs are, to say nothing of all the new music.

Altman: I went to Carnegie Hall, but Richardson was well. When he came he was wobbly, and he had me sit with him and turn pages. I remember so well that he played the slow movement from Dvorak's New World Symphony, an unusual choice of music, but one that tells a great deal about the musical life in the United States. As Professor Allen from Stanford said laughingly: "The organists [here] play symphonic pieces and the symphonies play transcribed organ pieces!"

Crawford: So it was more flexible programming than you would have found in Germany?

Altman: Much more. Germany was very rigid, and here you played symphonic movements or quartet movements, song adaptations or arrangements from other media, and the orchestra leaders played organ fugues of Bach usually arranged by Leopold Stowkowski and others.

As the name implies, the Free Synagogue was free. They had services on Sunday, not Saturday, the Shabbat, and they had no synagogue of their own. They rented Carnegie Hall whenever they needed it, and they had a very, very famous rabbi as their had, Rabbi Stephen Wise, who was a real leader of the Jewish people. He had an in with then president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and for this alone everybody looked up to him. He was a fantastic orator, a very handsome man, and he was preaching at those services. That day he was as close to me on the pulpit there as I am to you now.

Learning English

Altman: The sermon was very well done, but I couldn't understand it because I knew almost no English. I had learned a little bit on the boat trip and I had a few lessons in Berlin from a man who married a German girl, not Jewish, and who gave lessons to those who wanted to come to this country. He was not really a very good teacher. All he had was The New York Times of Sunday, which weighed twenty-five pounds or so, and that was what he read to me.

Crawford: Wasn't that terribly difficult for you?

Altman: Extremely, but one thing I learned very quickly was that you learn best by going to religious services, because the preachers are usually slow-speaking and the subject matter is repetitious, with the same words occurring again and again, so you get used to the idiom.

Crawford: Did you have more formal training after you arrived in the United States?

Altman: No, none whatsoever. I had my whole education in Germany up to the university level. Of foreign languages I had only Greek and Latin (twelve hours a week) and some sprinkling of French. English I didn't have at all, so that was a handicap, but it wasn't too bad because I had lots of company.

I had actually a very funny experience on the boat trip. There was another young fellow from Cologne who was asked if he spoke English, so he said that he did. But he definitely did not, and I was asked the same question and gave the same answer, that I knew English.

There were two gentlemen who expressed the desire to speak English only at the table and so the purser put us at the same table and when they realized that my friend and I didn't know any we were shunned by the two gentlemen, one from Boston and the other from New York, and I don't really blame them.

The only dish we could really pronounce was apple pie. So we pointed to it with our fingers and said we wanted "apple pee"! [laughter]

Crawford: Did you travel alone in this country? Did your parents come?

Altman: No, my parents stayed back in Germany. It wasn't easy to come to this country and what would they do here? At that time, while things went from bad to worse, the extermination camps and concentration camps of later years were not yet in evidence. We did not imagine the final barbarism of the Germans. The final words were spoken in, if I had to give a date, I would say it was 1940. It was not thought that it would get that bad at all.

Connections in the United States (Musical)

Crawford: What musical contacts did you make in Germany before you left?

Altman: I was very fortunate. In Germany I befriended a young fellow my age by the name of Allan Wayne who came from Terra Haute, Indiana. He was an artistic dancer, employed first by the opera company in Breslau--I don't know how he got there--and from there he went to Berlin where he danced in the best cabaret. The "Winter Garden," I think it was called.

Altman: I was his accompanist, and I played those artistic dance music things, and he always wanted me to come to Terra Haute to work with him and then go on tour with him.

In December of 1932, right before Hitler came to power, he left Berlin--he had a notion he should go home. He was also Jewish, but had switched to the Christian Science religion, and so he said to me to come to Terra Haute--he lived there with his mother--and we would work up a program and go on tour. As he left the railroad station in Berlin, he was hanging out of the window and said, "Don't forget to come."

"Why should I come? I'm very happy here," I said. But then a month later things changed drastically with the takeover of the Nazi government, and finally I decided to take up his invitation to come, but things didn't work out, and I couldn't get permission to come until later.

Anyway, Allan Wayne was my first contact. I saw him by the way in Chicago. But other contacts? Only my relatives here in San Francisco.

Crawford: So the fact that your relatives were in San Francisco caused you to come here.

Altman: Also that I had my fare paid. You know the Nazis imposed stipulations that if you left Germany they would let you take out ten dollars, and in my German passport it said that I promised never to come back to Germany! I can show it to you.

And so ten dollars in New York was nothing, but I had a boat trip paid through the Panama Canal to San Francisco, and that line went on strike. That meant that the ship line had to repay me what the ticket would have been, and that was almost two hundred dollars. It was a great deal of money and I got it in cash. For half of that I could take the train, so I had one hundred dollars when I arrived here instead of ten. That was really good luck.

I had taken the English boat from Southampton to New York and the train first to Chicago, where I stopped to greet my friend from Terra Haute, and then I went on. But I have to backtrack to New York, because while I did not play that service at Carnegie Hall, I did go to other synagogues where I got an offer in a place called the Hebrew Tabernacle, a synagogue of some prominence.

I was welcomed very cordially and I learned right away about the informality of American customs. You know in Germany there is a big fuss made about diplomas and it is all very, very

Altman: formal, but here it was the opposite. The cantor who was to engage me needed an organist today!. So I was to start the following Monday.

Crawford: But you didn't?

Altman: No, because I had my railroad ticket and was anxious to meet my relatives first. But I accepted the position in New York anyway, telling them that I would return in time to become their organist. That was my sincere intention. Having a job, limited as it was, made me feel so very much better and strengthened my self-confidence no end.

Then I went to Chicago to see Allan Wayne. We discussed the situation and he agreed that continuing on to San Francisco would be best for the immediate future. I used the time in Chicago to make contacts with other organists and by chance I heard of an opening in Glencoe, a suburb of Chicago.

So I auditioned there with music by Bach and Max Reger and was accepted! The temple (Reform) was beautiful, Rabbi Schulman young and nice, his wife lovely. They had great things in mind too, like a debut recital in Kimball Hall.

In Chicago I became acquainted with Lawrence Morton, the organist and musical director of the North Shore Congregation, a lively, progressive synagogue. They were working on the Sacred Service of Ernest Bloch, the very work which was commissioned by Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco! Of course, at that moment I had no idea that I would become Emanu-El's organist within just a few months! Luckily I was familiar with the work because the Neue Synagoge where I had been the organist had given the German premiere, and I had the program and review with me.

All this was but the beginning and as I was always interested in any kind of musical expression I want to mention the first recital I heard in the New World, namely the farewell concert of Rosa Ponselle in Carnegie Hall. It was glorious in every way. I was particularly interested in her accompanist, Richard Hageman, who had the reputation of knowing all his accompaniments from memory and in any key. One of his songs was the rage at the time; it was "Miranda," I believe.

While in Chicago I was anxious to hear their orchestra, which today ranks highest of them all. I did and the conductor was their second in command, Hans Lange.

V SETTLING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Crawford: It sounds as if you had offers everywhere you went.

Altman: Yes, but also I told them all I wanted to go to San Francisco. So when I arrived here I had those two positions to fall back on. I already felt very much better despite the low pay on which I could not have lived. But it was a beginning, you see, and you could use it as a stepping-stone. Also you could work in the synagogue on your own practice and improvement.

So I went to San Francisco, and the one thing I liked much better was the climate. In Chicago it was dreadful.

Crawford: You had been there in wintertime.

Altman: Yes, and it was really awful. I paid only five dollars for three weeks' stay. Can you imagine what kind of a room that was? [laughs]

But I arrived in San Francisco, and as I came off the train I must have made an awful impression on my relatives, two aunts and an uncle. They told me years later that I was so serious when I arrived in that heavy German overcoat!

I stayed with them three years, and that worked out very well, because one aunt had a son about my age, a young student at Columbia. We became close friends. Actually, upon my initial arrival in New York, he hadn't picked me up at the boat, but right afterwards I stayed with him at the International House, a very well known institution for students. There is one in Berkeley also. So that's it!

Crawford: What were your relatives doing here at the time?

Altman: Well, they were fairly old at the time and were not working. My uncle was in the jewelry business before.

Crawford: So you were in San Francisco and you decided not to take either of the other offers.

Teaching Piano: "An Awful Profession"

Altman: No. I humored those people in New York and Chicago along, delaying my decision. I didn't want to tie myself down too soon, because I was really too green and my English was still poor.

In San Francisco I was blessed with good luck as one good thing fell into place after another, which gave me a wonderful feeling. The reports I mailed to my parents were also their lifeline. They gave them hope as conditions for the German Jews got worse.

When I arrived here I was enamored right away. My relatives had a beautiful home on Jackson Street near Steiner in the Pacific Heights district, and right away I made all the right contacts. They took me over to their relatives in Oakland--a judge and a dentist--and I soon got my first position in a settlement house on San Bruno Avenue, giving piano lessons to beginners. I started really from the bottom up, because it is an awful profession to be a piano teacher!

Crawford: You never liked working at that, did you?

Altman: No, not with untalented pupils. Oh, a few I did enjoy. It was really very funny. There was a lady, Grace Wiener was her name, who ran the institution. When she saw me--she told me later on--she could not refuse me as I looked so much like the young Yehudi Menuhin!

Menuhin grew up in that settlement house and I think had his bar mitzvah there, too.

There I received five dollars for each afternoon of teaching. Three hours of teaching, and no fringe benefits, but since I stayed with my relatives in the beginning, it did not matter.

Later I started to give lessons on the outside, which were better paid, and then I started getting engagements in churches, and I was surprised that it was possible for me to play in church at all. In Europe it would have been unthinkable. No Catholic could play a service in a Lutheran church, no Lutheran in a convent.

American Recital Debut: Stanford University

Crawford: In October of that year you gave a recital at Stanford. Was that your debut?

Altman: Yes, I went by train; it was delightful--such a nice and comfortable feeling and there was a beautiful organ. Stanford still has it, by the way, in the chapel. They have another organ now, which is also very large, in addition to the first one.

Crawford: The new Fisk organ?

Altman: The second one is a Fisk, yes. But the first one was just as fine for its time as the Fisk is for us today. All organs are custom-made, none like any other. What constitutes "right" is a source of neverending debate. Still, we will not and actually cannot come to any truly final conclusion, and that is just as well. The debate makes for progress; it keeps organ builders and performers and composers growing.

Crawford: Is it largely a matter of taste?

Altman: Yes, but more enters into it. For instance, our sound ideal and our knowledge about these changing sound ideals grows through research. We are learning from the past and applying much of it for the future.

We realize today how important it is to design an organ for its main use: for services or for recitals. Although we argue constantly about organ design and construction we never come up with any definite answer as to what is the "right" or "wrong" instrument and we probably never shall.

Crawford: Good. Tell me how the Stanford concert came about.

Altman: Well, I knew Professor Warren D. Allen, Stanford's university organist. He had become nationally known because of essays on music in the military of all things.

I quickly found out that what I knew in the organ repertoire was totally lacking in variety and that I had better learn music written not for organ but for something else and learn how to play symphonic music on the organ.

I've forgotten the details but I played all kinds of arrangements and adaptations, not the real stuff I had learned in the old country. The average German organist gets by if he knows Bach, Max Reger, some Buxthehude, and maybe a little of some more

Altman: Baroque-style composers, but that's all. On that he can live all his life without having to learn much else. Nobody will expect anything different.

Crawford: So it's more challenging to play here?

Altman: Yes, it definitely is. Also taking lessons in America is lots more fun than in the old country where the teacher is a tyrant who gives in to his moods entirely.

A New Repertoire and an Experiment with Electronic Organs

Altman: Well, that was my first concert, and I don't think I got a review, but then I had a brainstorm. You know, the electronic organs had their debut at about this time.

Crawford: Was that the Hammond organ?

Altman: The Hammond organ, yes. I conceived the idea that since the Hammond organ is movable, for the first time we could use the organ with the orchestra, which you never could do well before. You cannot rip a pipe organ out of its case and move it. It's "put" forever. But with the Hammond organ, for the first time in our existence, we could use it like it was a piano.

There was a lady conductor named Antonia Brico, very well known, who was living in Denver and trying to get a foothold with an orchestra there, not very successfully. Antonia is a wonderful human being, and she was invited to conduct a concert with the WPA orchestra here. I approached her with the idea of becoming her soloist in the Handel Organ Concerto in G minor, playing on the new Hammond organ.

The combination of organ with orchestra was well received by the audiences, the reviews were positive, and there were compliments from headquarters of the Hammond Company as well.

Unfortunately, the company turned towards the commercial, not the artistic side, and so there was no enthusiasm among organists for the Hammond.

Introduction to Alfred Hertz and Pierre Monteux

Altman: To go back to Miss Brico and how I approached her, it was probably through Alfred Hertz. Alfred Hertz was the San Francisco Symphony conductor until 1929, but he was still well beloved in San Francisco.

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Altman: I remember my meeting him: it was strange--funny. In the house where my relatives lived and where I lived, there was a lady who was a piano teacher. She lived on the ground floor and she invited me to come and see a dance program given by the daughter of our then symphony conductor, Pierre Monteux.

So I went with her, and in back of me sat a lady who later I found out was Mrs. Lilly Hertz, the wife of the conductor. Now I must confess that my knowledge and enthusiasm for dance is very limited. I mean I like it very much, but not for more than fifteen minutes. To me, it is built up like the art of Rembrandt or Beethoven, and I don't think it's in the cards. It is just movement and body acrobatics and I think it's played up too high.

Maybe that was the reason that I did not enjoy the dance program particularly, and there was also the thing I learned later on about the basic behavior difference between Europe and America, that the Europeans are given to expressing bad thoughts very freely at the drop of a hat, and that Americans are much kinder and nicer.

Crawford: You're talking about your reaction to the performance?

Altman: Yes. That I expressed myself on the spot. I don't know what I did but I must have made some derogatory remarks about the dancing, and Mrs. Hertz took that to mean criticism of the family of Monteux. It sounds strange when I talk like that, and I should really not have said that, because the Monteux were marvelous to me later on.

Anyway, she was elated with my reaction and patted me on the back and invited me to their home to meet her husband, who was still a fabulous musician. Of course, he gave the first performance of Salome at the Met and other things like Parsifal. Top man.

Crawford: Did she approve of the fact that you criticized the performance?

Altman: Yes. It endeared me to her because her husband was the former conductor. You see it was [the feelings of] the man who was out toward the man who was in. Not that Monteux had anything to do with it. Females are more jealous, and males are more tolerant. Even nowadays!

Crawford: So that is how you met Alfred Hertz?

Altman: Yes, by making derogatory remarks about the daughter of Pierre Monteux! [laughter]

The WPA Orchestra

Crawford: What happened because of your meeting?

Altman: A great deal. I went to the house, and then he took to me. I played for him a Brahms sonata, which impressed him, and then the organ playing also.

He was at that time the director of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Orchestra. They had a regular symphony orchestra and the conductor was their protege, Leslie Hodge, an Australian boy, very handsome, a little bit older than I was. He later became the conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, and for a while he was in Guadalajara, Mexico, also as a conductor. Very talented boy.

Crawford: Tell me about the Hertzes.

Altman: He was the funniest man. He was so full of jokes, very jovial, and devoted to great music, up to Mahler. I don't think he went much beyond that, but he didn't have to. Mahler and then Strauss, of course. She was a--she was a nut. [chuckles] She was in the first place a very convinced Christian Scientist, really believing that God heals directly, you need no medication and no physician, and she stuck with that. She was terribly bossy; she wanted me to marry one girl after another, and she also recommended elderly women, for occasional use. I mean, it was-- Just a nut! But good natured. I don't want to shock you!

Crawford: No, no. [laughs] Go ahead!

Altman: They were like cat and dog. They couldn't stand each other, and when she came in and he was playing the piano or something, he would say, "Out, out, Lilly, go out!" And he would throw her out. It was terrible but it was their way and she was very nice to many people.

Altman: They had a wonderful property on Mount Tamalpais, a huge place there, and very often we would go there and have a meal in the open. Unluckily, she did not believe that eating was necessary, and so it was always very small what you got there, and he as well as all of us, we always ate either before or afterwards, because on her portions you could not be satisfied.

He loved pretty girls and he would say, "Come for dinner, stay for breakfast," and laugh his high-pitched boy's laugh.

Crawford: Did they help you musically?

Altman: Yes, of course. He had to make a new edition of some Wagner, and for that he needed a new piano score. In other words the orchestral score newly edited, a reduction for the piano called a vocal score. But he didn't like the one there and so asked Leslie for this and that, and me for this and that.

Leslie did the Tannhaüser Overture, which is not easily done (hums theme), and my job was to do the Tannhaüser March, and also the Prize Song from Die Meistersinger, those two. The publisher, by the way, was the well-known Carl Fisher in New York.

And then I had to play The Pines of Rome organ part, which Leslie conducted.

Piano Lessons for Leon Fleisher

Altman: And then that same year Leon Fleisher, who was a boy of eight years, needed a piano teacher, and Mr. Hertz recommended me to be the piano teacher, and I did that for one year, every single day of the year. I taught that young genius the piano and a large repertory. One thing was the Variations Serieuses of Mendelssohn, the Sonatina by Ravel, and the Well-Tempered Clavier, and some Beethoven sonatas.

The boy was so phenomenal. You know, I would give him a piano sonata of Beethoven and the next day he had it memorized. Frightening.

Crawford. It is he who has lost the use of one hand, isn't it? And he plays the Ravel Concerto for the Left Hand.

Altman: Yes. He will play again the coming season.

Crawford: That is nice for you, that you see him still.

Altman: Yes. I gave him lessons every day for one year, by the arrangement of the Hertzes. The family lived on Fulton Street, and he was the sweetest boy, and was he handsome! He had eyes to die over and gorgeous hair, beautiful child, and very highly motivated and very interested in everything. A very good boy, and not a mean strain in him.

The Fleishers lived in San Francisco, and there was an older brother, Raymond, also very musical, and also a very lovely boy.

To give you an idea of the jokes the boy caught on to: Once had had a bad cold, so he was looking out of the window as I was coming, and rushed to the door. I said, "Leon, how is your cold?" "Oh, it's very bad," he said. "Oh, that's wonderful," I said.

He looked up, startled, and then I said, "Yes. If your cold is in very bad shape, then it's good for you! That means you get the best of it now." [laughter] That was very sophisticated, and he understood it. You can tell him that joke today, and he will remember it.

Pierre Monteux and the French Influence: The Musical Community in the 1930s

Crawford: Tell me what the music community was like in the 1930s.

Altman: It was very strongly oriented towards the French, in vocal as well as piano music, and it was very naturally strengthened by the fact that Pierre Monteux was our musical leader at the time. And if you would compare his programs with today's--with Blomstedt's--you would find much more French music and with French music I make the distinction of Berlioz on one side, whom I worship--I consider him absolutely one of the greatest composers ever, and definitely France's glory in music--and then the other was the Debussy school.

Of course, Monteux made his mark as the first conductor who performed the Sacre Du Printemps; he inaugurated that in Paris and he conducted it here from memory. You cannot follow the pages, because you would get lost instantly. The counting is too irregular. Have you ever seen the score? Would you like to? [pauses to get score]

Here, you have constantly to shift the count. It goes constantly, 1-2-3-, 1-2-3-4-5, 1-1-1. You know some counts are only one beat, and the orchestra is relying on the conductor to make absolutely no mistake. It would be chaos.

Crawford: He would lose the orchestra.

Altman: Absolutely. They would go in all directions.

VI A NEW CHAPTER: TEMPLE EMANU-EL AND OTHER POSTS

Working at the Temple

Crawford: Let us talk about your work at Temple Emanu-El.

Altman: The Temple organist when I came was Wallace Sabin, who was sixty-nine years old and obviously a very nervous man, and since the job demanded too much of him he welcomed my being with him on the organ bench whenever something difficult came up. So I would slip over and play on the beautiful organ at Temple Emanu-El.

Cantor Rinder was used to seeing me around whenever Mr. Sabin was on vacation, and I would play then. When Sabin died very suddenly--he had evidently a heart attack while conducting a choral concert--I was just hanging on. You couldn't even say that I tried for the job.

Crawford: How did you get involved initially with the Temple?

Altman: Well, my family were members to begin with; everybody knew Cantor Rinder, and everybody knew Mr. Sabin, and whenever I was introduced somebody would say: "That is young Mr. Altman, he does the service; he is an organist." "Oh, does he know Cantor Rinder?" It was almost automatic.

I never had a contract at Temple Emanu-El. I played for fifty years, from 1937 to 1987 without a contract! [laughs]

Crawford: Describe the Temple and the congregation.

Altman: Well, it was just the place to be. It was just so overwhelming that there was no other within even a mile.

Crawford: The most prominent temple?

Altman: Yes, and still is. So all the people who had a great interest in music would belong and would sponsor projects, and Cantor Rinder had a real knack for getting them to do that and so we had for the first time really great composers compose for the synagogue again. Two or three: Ernest Bloch, of course.

Crawford: They were commissioned?

Altman: Actually it was one of the bankers from New York (in that case), named Warburg. Another commissioned composer was Darius Milhaud. He wrote a whole sacred service for us.

Crawford: Was that when he was working at Mills College?

Altman: Yes. He was at Mills.

Crawford: I noticed that you had correspondence with Aaron Copland.

Altman: Yes, but only that he would not do a service. The other day I saw his organ symphony. He sent me a copy and said he wished I would play it. I never wrote to him about that.

Crawford: Did you ever play it?

Altman: I never got to do it, but I did play many, many compositions by Copland. He has a little organ piece called Episode, it is not much, and then we did In the Beginning, God Created, a capella piece. I don't know if you heard it; it's about twenty-five minutes long. It was given at my urging, and the conductor at that time was Robert Commanday, who was a choir conductor before he became a music critic.

He is a very good choral conductor. He also did an oratorio of Mozart which nobody knew called The Penitent David; David Penitente in Latin.

Crawford: So you did some adventurous programming, and you could do whatever you wanted.

Altman: Yes, it was welcome indeed, because nobody else did it. All of the things I did at the Temple were novelties. Not for the services; there was the cantor for those, but for my recitals. We had choral ensembles and we had instrumental ensembles and we did lots of good stuff.

Crawford: How about funding?

Altman: I got the money from the Musicians Fund. They had a transcription and recording fund and when the recording industry issued something that was played, there was a special fund that they had to turn over to the union.

Altman: That fund was distributed nationally, and you had to apply for it and if they liked the idea and you could show them success, they would give you money again. So I asked many a time. Think how beautiful! We had the whole Art of the Fugue under that sponsorship in 1949.

Crawford: How time-consuming was your work at the Temple?

Altman: Well, it was a percentage [of my time], but I hate to say how much, because I did so many things all at once, and that is also characteristic of life here, because we are either going up or we are going down, and it is very difficult to stay on an even keel and to repeat yourself. In America this is not the way to be successful or even satisfied. And that would apply to my work at the Temple.

The regular routine work would not have required too much, but there were always so many outside things.

Teaching at the University of California and a Church Post

Altman: There were many other opportunities for me. In the first place, I could also have a church job, which I had during the last forty years at one of the Christian Science churches here, the Ninth Church. There they even have a very fine new organ, an Aeolian-Skinner, the last of that company before they went bankrupt.

They don't exist anymore, which is a shame because they built beautiful instruments. One of the very last ones was here in the Ninth Church, and they said, "We bought that for you, because the old one is not good enough."

Crawford: Pipe organ.

Altman: Yes, of course.

Crawford: So you had those two jobs, and were you still teaching at that time?

Altman: Like mad, and I also started a program for the University of California extension in 1947. First I taught the history of organ music, a course I gave in the organ loft of the Temple. Every Monday night there would be a large number of people and they would all be freezing in the winter, and have a wonderful time.

Crawford: They don't offer that anymore, do they?

Altman: No. Everything went under.

Crawford: Why?

Altman: I could cover many jobs initially: I could play at the Temple and at the Church; I could give those courses for the Cal extension; I could give private lessons, and teach at Berkeley. I also played the piano an awful lot for singers and instrumentalists. But as these jobs grew, I gave them up, one after another after another, because they could not longer be handled by one man.

Crawford: Did someone take over the UC classes?

Altman: Many did what I did alone. But not the UC classes, because those went under. The reason was really a very personal one. You know Estelle Caen, the sister of Herb Caen?

Crawford: No.

Altman: A very tall person, very intelligent and nice lady, and she lost her husband to cancer. She remarried again very happily, and didn't want to do university work anymore. And so she gave it up and they could not find a successor. She ran the department where I worked and so the whole thing folded. That was a dirty shame.

Crawford: What else did you give up?

Altman: Well, for example, Carmel. For eighteen years I was the official organist. I started, I think, in 1948,and this grew from very modest beginnings--one concert repeated several times until they elongated the season. In the meantime I had started playing in Europe again and I had to stop playing in Carmel. My first concert in Europe was in 1960, in London.

The Carmel Bach Festival

Crawford: Please talk about your position there. You were the organist at the Carmel Bach Festival from 1948 to 1965. How did you come to get that position?

Altman: I can't remember exactly, but-- [Mrs. Altman reminds him that it was through music critic Alexander Fried.] That's right. You know, Alexander Fried did many fine things for many people, and he suggested to me that I contact that Bach Festival.

Altman: So I called Dene Denny and Hazel Watrous, the two ladies who ran the Festival, and they liked the idea and invited me to see the organ.

I went to see it. It was in the Episcopal church (now City Hall) and it was in bad shape. The organ case had mice in it, and when one played they jumped out and ran down the aisles.

The organ maintenance man came from the Peninsula and he was congenial and artistic but not the best-equipped mechanic. He fixed only the notes I used the most! [laughter] Later, though, they got a very good German organ, a Bosch from Göttingen.

Gastone Usigli was the music director then. He was an excellent musician, but he wasn't engaged to conduct opera, which he was best at. He was a fiery dreamer, I would say, and an honest, sincere, devoted man. Maybe too sensitive, because he never got the positions he deserved. He was a composer too; his music was something like Scriabin's.

With Usigli the performances were very high-class for that time. All of us have had much to learn and musical research has unveiled many a secret in correct baroque interpretation. But as I said he wasn't recognized as he should have been. As a lasting tribute to his memory a recording of his tone poem "Prometheus" was made. It is simply beautiful and exciting and deserves to be heard.

Gastone conducted at Temple Emanu-El, and the year after I did The Art of the Fugue there, 1950, he was so impressed that he did it at the Bach Festival in Carmel.

Credit for conducting the work there must go to young Jan Popper, a most difficult task since there was no edition for chamber ensemble printed as yet and Popper and Usigli had to make up one for their program. My playing quite a few of the individual canons and fugues on the organ lightened the load and at the same time opened new musical horizons and understanding for this work, the culmination of all contrapuntal music.

Later the Italian government honored Usigli by bestowing a high order on him. The affair took place in the home of Kurt Herbert Adler on Palm Avenue. A large and festive crowd paid their respect to Gastone and his wife Betsy, who were aglow with well-deserved pride and very happy. It was to be the last recognition also. Returning home Gastone suddenly got ill and died.

Crawford: How was a successor chosen?

Altman: The same year Gastone passed away, 1955, Richard Lert, then the conductor of the Pasadena Symphony, and Sandor Salgo stepped in and Sandor was the logical choice to stay as regular musical director. What makes me put the choice so diplomatically? Youth in music regarding Bach was of utmost importance. Bach research had finally caught up with the practical performance requirements of all Baroque music and the older Lert was steeped in the more romantic interpretation of our fathers and grandfathers.

As one of many strange coincidences in and of my life, Lert was my idol during my school years in my hometown Breslau, where in the 1920s he brought Breslau's musical standards up to a level never before nor later achieved. Lert then went as First Kapellmeister to the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin. The Nazi advent forced him to leave and the United States recognized his prominence once again.

Once more should I have a chance to meet this great musician. He was guest conductor of the Oakland orchestra. (At a party afterwards in his honor I surprised and pleased him when I could remind him of the exact works he conducted because I had them written into my scores.) In the Los Angeles area he was highly regarded as a conductor and teacher, representing the values and traditions of the well-remembered past.

Crawford: Back to Mr. Salgo: Did he get to conduct opera?

Altman: No, and that was a pity since he loved to do opera. But he was guest conductor at the State Opera of East Berlin and also for the San Francisco Opera. And also in Carmel, although the Festival does not really call it opera; Sandor gave Mozart operas as well as Fidelio, and always to great applause.

Crawford: Did the change from Usigli to Salgo also change your activity?

Altman: Good question. No, not really. I continued my organ recitals, which had to be played at least twice to accommodate the crowds, and in my last year I played the greatest of Bach's Chorale collections, the complete "German Organ Mass." For that I was splendidly aided by Priscilla Salgo, the wife of Sandor, who served and still serves as chorusmistress.

Crawford: You mentioned that the Festival social activities were considerable at first.

Altman: That has been gradually changing. When I first came to Carmel, the so-called social aspects were overwhelming. There were constantly big parties, many in Carmel Valley, because Carmel proper is usually cold and clammy during the Festival.

Altman: Three gentlemen must be mentioned, however briefly, since time is running out on us and even an oral history must terminate some time. The top patron was Noel Sullivan, whose largesse and vocal performance of the St. Matthew Passion remain in one's memory as does the contribution of James (Jimmy) Schwabacher, whose singing and chanting as Evangelist can hardly be surpassed. For a long time all harpsichord work and all musical problems were referred to Ralph Linslay, who was called "Mister Carmel Bach Festival." Enough said!

It was a privilege, honor and joy to have served as the "official" organist of the Carmel Bach Festival for eighteen consecutive years and to watch and participate in the stunning growth of program-making, choice of soloists, and novel ideas like the midnight music in the Mission.

All this is to the credit of Maestro Salgo, and on a personal note I wish to thank him for asking me to play organ concertos with his orchestra, which he so admirably leads.

Performing with Arthur Fiedler

Crawford: Let's discuss your work with Arthur Fiedler in the 1950s. You said that Arthur Fiedler was very important to you in your career.

Altman: He was the most important conductor for me. In the summer he came to San Francisco to conduct at the Civic Auditorium. There they have a fine Austin organ that had been built for and used in the Panama Exposition of 1915. Saint-Saens was the conductor. They had that large pipe organ and Arthur Fiedler programmed many works for organ and orchestra. The Art Commission appointed me as organist. I served over thirty years. For that I thank Joe Dyer and Martin Snipper here.

The San Francisco Symphony, as I mentioned before, had no permanent organ in the opera house. They had chosen to buy a chandelier instead of an organ although there was to have been a pipe organ installed, and so they always imported an electronic instrument, which was never satisfactory. There was no joy in that, and none of the symphony conductors programmed great organ pieces.

But Fiedler did, and I played them, and when I finished he would say, "What do you want to play next year?" When he was particularly satisfied he would engage me to come to Boston and play with the Boston Pops, and I did that several years, beginning in 1954.

Crawford: What works did you perform with Fiedler?

Altman: I played several of the Handel Concertos, the Haydn C major Concerto, several of the Mozart church sonatas, the Bossi Concerto, the "Cortege et Litanie" of Dupre. My greatest success came with my performing for the first time locally the Poulenc Organ Concerto in G minor, which I was asked to repeat several times. At that time Poulenc was considered to be quite "modern."

Another "first" was my performance of Alfredo Casella's Concerto Romano--in my opinion a top-notcher with an ultra-dazzling Toccata at the end. This I did in Boston also. Unfortunately, my fellow organists have not taken any interest in the work. What a pity!

Finally, I combined three movements from cantatas of J.S. Bach, thereby producing a regular organ concerto. Again I regret that other organists did not take up the opportunity to perform a brilliant and beautiful concerto by the organists' greatest master, Johann Sebastian Bach.

Also in the 1950s I played with the Standard Oil Company's Standard Hour radio broadcasts and for their school music programs. I should mention Carmen Dragon, because he was such a fine musician and conductor. I remember playing for them the G minor Concerto of Handel, a special occasion for me since this was the only time that Standard Oil engaged an organist as a soloist with orchestra. Luckily, a live recording was made and Standard Oil presented me with a copy, which I kept.

Crawford: How would you evaluate Dragon's conducting style?

Altman: His musicianship was quite similar to Arthur Fiedler. Both were equally interested in classical music and so-called "entertainment" works, including show tunes. Both went about their assignments without any special ado, in a practical manner, never wasting precious minutes which were in too short supply anyway. Both were immensely successful with the public and their recordings hit the million mark again and again.

One of Maestro Fiedler's ambitions remained unfulfilled: to become a "serious" symphony conductor and to get out from under the syndrome "Pops." His musical personality may be illustrated by two remarks: Things did not go well at a rehearsal one day, and after several tries he stopped the orchestra: "What happened; what went wrong? Am I doing something wrong? Don't hesitate to tell me!" The orchestra sat in stony silence until maestro released the tension with the remark half serious, half smiling, "Don't you dare!"

Altman: At another rehearsal, a soprano sang an unknown Meyerbeer aria with no rapport between vocalist and orchestra. Fiedler interfered with, "What is the matter, has none of you played Meyerbeer before?" And after a few seconds, "Aren't you lucky!"

The Legion of Honor: Municipal Organist

Crawford: Tell me something about the organ recitals at the Legion of Honor. You started those in 1952 and continue with them still on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Altman: Well, those started in 1924 when they got the Skinner organ. That is E.M. Skinner. The organist there at that time was Uda Waldrop, a genius of the first order. He could accompany in all keys on sight.

Crawford: Could you as well?

Altman: Not now; maybe then. We had to be able to transpose in all keys, but not on sight.

Anyway, Uda Waldrop was not hard-working, and he played always the same old pieces. He used me as his substitute, knowing I wouldn't try to take over his position.

He had cancer, which was then a hopeless thing, and he took his own life. They asked me and Richard Purvis [to replace him], but there was such a huge and unruly crowd always that Purvis finally quit.

Then Newton Pashley became co-organist. He played everything from memory. Unfortunately he was overworked and died suddenly, following a stroke. Then I asked for John Fenstermaker. I phoned him and asked if he would be interested and he said he would be delighted, so that is the way it is now. The organ there is absolutely unique, because it combines regular stops with percussion imitations: Chinese blocks, triangles, timpani, snare drums; a whole section. The audience just eats it up. It even has thunder--no lightning!

Two stops play in the courtyard through a frieze that lifts up, and the antiphonal placement of the pipes sends the sound throughout the Museum. This has been a fantastic opportunity for me, of course. I used frequently to enhance the programs by inviting vocal ensembles, especially the various ones under Winifred Baker's baton. Frequently I asked splendid local soloists. How many wonderful musicians there are in the Bay Area!

Performing in Europe

Crawford: After 1960 did you perform in Europe most summers?

Altman: Every summer after. I played mostly in London.

Crawford: Who arranged those tours for you?

Altman: For an organist it is very easy to arrange that. Let's take Switzerland, where at the end I played almost exclusively. Let's say we went to a place in the French Alps. We stopped at a nice hotel, where I took a little walk, and I heard the organ in the village church. So I went in, listened to the organist play, and then I made some remarks about the piece, such as "Oh, that sounds lovely. I do not know the piece, but I can tell you are playing in F major."

That was enough to say. The organist came down from the organ loft and said, "Do you like organ music? Do you know about organ music?" "Oh, yes. I am an organist."

"Do you know that I know you because you stopped at such or such a hotel. I know this because I am the proprietor!" And then when we got more friendly: "You must meet the organist of Montreux, a bigger town, who is my teacher and he has a much bigger organ, and you must meet."

So there is a regular way to become acquainted with the local musicians and to get an invitation.

On one occasion an organist was so pleased with my playing that she introduced me to her teacher, the organist of the Reform Church in Montreux, Pierre Pidoux. Mr. Pidoux, now retired, is not only an excellent organist but also an authority on Huguenot music, a celebrity. His articles and scholarly editions have made him known worldwide.

There is a certain ritual about getting an engagement for an organ recital. Since it would be unprofessional to solicit invitations, the local organist will ask you--of course, only if he is at all interested in you--to "try the organ," and from the impression he gets from this "audition," success or rejection result. This procedure is a good one and we all use it, myself included.

Crawford: What a clever system. Where did it take you from Montreux?

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THE CHAMBER CHORUSES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CIVIC CHORALE,

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WINIFRED BAKER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Saturday, April 22, 1989 at 2:30 p.m.

A SPRING CONCERT

SICUT SERVUS — Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525 - 1594)
"Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God"

NE TIMEAS MARIA — Tomas Luis de Victoria (c. 1548 - 1611)
"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with the Lord" (Luke, i, 31-2)

NON NOBIS DOMINE — William Byrd (1538 - 1623)
"Not unto us, Lord, but unto Thy name be glory" (Canon à 3)

ADOREMUS TE, CHRISTE — Orlandus Lassus (1532 - 1594)
"We worship thee, O Christ and we bless Thee who wast crucified for the redemption of the world. Have mercy upon us" [Double quartet]

TWO CHORAL MEDITATIONS — Ludwig Altman present here today
i) May the words of my mouth
Soprano Anne Perry Trapani
ii) O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer

THREE SHAKESPEARE SONGS — Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)
i) Full Fathom Five (The Tempest)
ii) The Cloud-Capp'd Towers (The Tempest)
iii) Over hill, Over dale (A Midsummer Night's Dream)

PSALM 150 — Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)
"O praise God"
The Winifred Baker Children's Chorus joins the Chamber groups with percussion

THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO

present

AN ORGAN CONCERT

by

LUDWIG ALTMAN

Saturday, April 22
Sunday, April 23
4:00 p.m.

1989

Introduction to a Passover Melody	Ludwig Altman
A Medley of Pilgrimage Festival Tunes	Ludwig Altman
Music for a Flute Clock A first presentation: Robert Landis joins Mr. Altman	Wilhelm Friedeman Bach
Three Service Voluntaries	
Passepieds One and Two (from Orchestral Suite in C Major)	Johann Sebastian Bach
Andante in C minor (from a Harpsichord Concerto)	Johann Christian Bach
Allegro Maestoso (from a Concerto Grosso)	Georg Frederick Handel

These concerts are sponsored in part by a grant from the California Arts Council.

Altman: After the concert, Mr. Pidoux phoned the organist of the cathedral in Lausanne, the largest church of all of Switzerland, telling him how well he liked my recital and so strong was his recommendation that the cathedral organist, Mr. Andre Luy, engaged me for the following year without having heard me!

So I played in Lausanne, and this concert was attended by an organist from Berne, the capital city. After the concert there was a party given, and this organist from Berne introduced himself, and since I was going to Berne, he said I must look at his organs--he had three under his command--and that was the beginning of a lasting, very close friendship that led to many get-togethers. Our wives also hit it off personally.

An Important Assignment for the BBC

Altman: Then in London I was very anxious to play for the BBC, because of its great prestige and because there are funds available, a professional stipendium. Well, the BBC could not quite make up its mind, was always half warm and half cold, but once I said, "Why don't you send some musical spy when I play a live concert and you can then decide what you want to do. If yes, fine; if no, also fine."

So I think they did that, because I gave a concert in London in the financial district, a noontime concert, and the day after that I got an invitation to come to the office there to see the man in charge.

He had a double name; one half was Jackson and the other half I forgot. But he said they would like me to play a concert there the next time I came to London, and that they might give me Festival Hall. I almost fell over when he said that. I was scared to death!

At the place where I had played my last concert in London, the organist was a lady of great ability, and she said that she could not hear me play because she had had to practice at Festival Hall. I said, "You must have a concert pretty soon," and she said, "Oh, no, only in November, but it is so hard to get any practice time on that organ because they are constantly recording and rehearsing all day and all night, and whenever I get a chance I go there and practice my programs." I thought, "Oh, my God, I cannot do that; I am not that good!" I cannot take a chance on getting an hour or two before I play the program.

Altman: So I asked him modestly whether it would be possible to play somewhere where I could have more preparation time. He was a little bit peeved; I had hurt his feelings, but luckily he had an out and he said, "When I spoke about playing at Festival Hall, I said I might be able to get you Festival Hall," and then he assigned me a very fine cathedral in Islington, a part of London, a Catholic church just ready-made for recording.

It was wonderful. It was a very hot day, which is rare in London, and we all sat there without any encumbrances. The BBC people set up their machinery outside the church--they didn't even come in and we spoke to each other over the telephone and it was very easy. We didn't even use up the two hours allotted for the recording.

But the BBC had wanted to honor me with Festival Hall organ, which every organist would jump at, but I wouldn't have had enough practice time, although the pieces I knew in my sleep. They had wanted two programs of half an hour each, but the point is that an organist needs an awfully long time to get used to a new organ, particularly such a huge thing as the Hall organ.

If you have a Dupré, there is no problem because the man is a topnotch genius, but for me that is a different story, and I was scared of the riches he offered me. I asked him to scale it down, giving me a smaller organ and a much more modest place to play it in, but where I could go whenever I wanted to practice.

Crawford: What did you record?

Altman: He said the program should be like a meal. Different dishes to please everybody. Of course, that is not our theory any more today, but the British are very backwards that way, and whatever we do they do fifty years later. They are always very conservative.

Crawford: So you chose your own program.

Altman: Yes, under Mr. So-and-So-Jackson, who had special ideas. I played some Ernest Bloch; I played some Mendelssohn, and some Bach, all kinds of things. I specialize, of course, in music written for mechanical reproduction by C. P. E. Bach and Beethoven. That was in '68 or '69, I think.

A Triumphant Return to Germany

Crawford: Talk a bit about going back to Germany in 1964, which I believe was the first time you returned.

Altman: Yes, that was one of the most memorable highlights of my life, our going back to Germany for the first time. At that time there was a very musical German consul-general here who made the connection, and I was given a tour of my own choosing, and I played then in Munich and several places which I've forgotten now. I had also a lecture at that time with an official reception in Berlin. That was the big thing. It was done under the auspices of the government and the Christian Diocese of Berlin. I have somewhere the posters, you know the European posters that go on the kiosks. Those things were pasted all around town.

Crawford: Did you get a large audience?

Altman: It was so crowded they ran out of programs and I had to announce my own program. They sent up to the organ loft to ask if I had any programs and I had two, so I had to give them one and one I brought home. The entire press came and I had about eight reviews. It was a great day, and some of my old teachers came.

Crawford: That was quite an honor. So the government in Bonn invited you?

Altman: Yes, through the connection here with the Consul, Dr. Somnier.

Crawford: How about the lecture?

Altman: Yes, I had a lecture but this is also different from the informal speaking that we do here. There, if somebody gives a lecture, he has to write it down and he just reads it off and then he gets paid for it handsomely. Particularly in Berlin where there is a very large radio audience and they pay you one-half the stipulated price before and then the second half when it has actually gone over the waves.

My talk was over the radio, and I didn't even have to read it. They have special readers just for that, so I wrote it and it was read. The topic was the life of an ordinary organist in the United States. I have always thought of myself as a local musician, and I would rather be a good local musician, maybe a little better than the average, than to be a minor star, for which I have no talent anyway.

My concert was at the famous Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, the one you see in every picture of Berlin. I performed some hitherto unknown Mendelssohn pieces, a Fantasy and Fugue in C minor of Bach, and several pieces of Roger Sessions and Ellis Kohs.

I chose Sessions because I didn't know anything else of lasting quality. It is a sad truth that there is an immense amount of second-rate music written for organ. But there is a shortage of great music, in America particularly, written for

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Altman: organ. We have Bach, and that's what we have! We depend on this one composer almost entirely. How many towering geniuses outside Bach are there who have written for organ? And how many or how few, how very few masterworks can we muster?

Several years later I went again to Berlin to play at the Church of the Twelve Apostles.

Crawford: What did going back to Germany represent to you?

Altman: I had very mixed feelings. I always analyze the relationship between the Jewish people who were once German Jews and the Germans. Basically, I always feel like a couple that was once happily married, is then divorced in an acrimonious fashion, and years and years and years later meet again. What happens is that everybody is on their best behavior, and I feel that this is the case whenever I go to Germany and meet German people.

A very special case is to be made for musicians living in peace with the "eternal" Germany because of the music. Possibly three quarters of the overall repertoire was composed by German and Austrian composers.

Crawford: Do you still go during the summers to play?

Altman: Yes, but I had a heart attack and I was advised to cut down, so I now don't play any more, but I do a lot of work over there. Did I show you the recording of the Mozart? That was my project for the last few summers.

A Discovery: Mozart and Works for Mechanical Organ

Altman: There is in a very small town in Switzerland a museum of mechanical organ-clock pieces. In that museum alone there are seven hundred, I was told. I didn't count them. And possibly, some of those pieces are original organ-clock pieces by Mozart.

Crawford: Yes, you showed me the music.

Altman: Those pieces are now recorded.

Crawford: Do you arrange for the recordings?

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

TEN PIECES

FOR AN

ORGAN CLOCK

A FIRST EDITION FOR ORGAN (OR OTHER KEYBOARD INSTRUMENT)

by

Ludwig Altman

$5.95

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Foreword

These ten charming and brilliant pieces for a mechanically activated organ clock are published here for the first time. The edition is based on the autograph in the Library of the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, entitled 'Stücke für Spieluhren auch Drehorgeln von C.P.E. Bach.'

The device of using a clock mechanism to activate organ pipes, bellows, barrels, etc., was popular all through the Baroque era. With a growing refinement and reliability of these instruments came an increasing interest and willingness of great composers to contribute original works for mechanical musical reproduction. Foremost among them were Handel, C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Cherubini.

C.P.E. Bach's clock pieces were composed during his years as court musician to King Frederick the Great at Potsdam. The King was intrigued with mechanically reproduced music and had organ clocks built for the New Palais and for the City Castle of Potsdam.

The edition presents the score as it appears in the Brussels manuscript; added are only the registration suggestions, a few manual changes, distribution between the hands, and some fingering – all clearly marked as editorial additions. The numbering of the four Polonoises is original.

While the music was intended for organ pipes, it is equally well-suited for harpsichord or piano.

Ludwig Altman

Anthologia Antiqua

BOOK SIX

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Altman: I would say that I am the promoter. The man who has the material did not realize its potential interest and value to the musical world, certainly to organists, because it means we have a few more pieces for the organ by Mozart; we have five instead of three.

Crawford: Where is the town?

Altman: The town in Seewen; a tiny place. I thought that there should be an edition not only of the sounds of the clock but also of the actual text so that one could play it, and finally they got somebody from Berne to listen to it long enough to write down the notes, and he has done more or less well. It could have been better.

Additionally, this transcriber wrote the notes so small that one cannot really use the text, so what will be necessary is to get a better copy made and use many more pages. It's so small that to read it I have to stand on the keys! I have revised it, but I don't want to do it any more. Let somebody else do it! The clock, by the way has thirty-two soundings--pipes. Seewen is the only place where I can hear the original clock; the rest I have to hear on tapes. So there is always plenty to do over there.

Crawford: You have also produced the first edition of organ works, including a piece for mechanical organ by Beethoven.

Altman: Many great composers--among them Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Handel--wrote for mechanical organ. I transcribed some of them, including works by Carl Philipp Emanuel. There I get royalties, while with my Beethoven edition, of which the publisher C.F. Peters told me over six thousand copies sold already, I don't. I was so foolish I took a straight fee!

In that edition of Beethoven are collected all of his organ works published for the first time.

I also transcribed some orchestral movements of Telemann for the organ and gave them the title "Suite Baroque."

Crawford: What about your Mendelssohn editions?

Altman: To our great surprise we organists have learned of the existence of many single organ pieces of Mendelssohn beside the six sonatas and three preludes and fugues. This additional Mendelssohniana is most welcome, since we have only sparse representation from this romantic period, the first half of the last century. There may be up to fifty pieces! Of those, six have been published in

Altman: my edition. In time this edition will be superseded when the complete Mendelssohn opus will be published by the DDR, the Deutsche-Demokratische-Republik.

Thoughts on Composing

Crawford: What about your compositions? What has composing meant to you?

Altman: An organist should be able to compose some. It could be the most important thing of all, though it wasn't for me.

Actually the first push in that direction came from Cantor Portnoy. Our music at the Temple had been for baritone soloist up until he came, and he was a tenor.

So in the early 1960s I began to work on a complete sacred service for tenors. It was published in 1963. It is always difficult for me to get started, but once I did I rolled along and I learned to write well for voices and did many settings of Psalms.

Crawford: Which were your finest ones?

Altman: Psalms 13 and 47. They are damn good, not to mince words!

Later I won the Isadore Freed Prize--first prize--for my Psalm 67. It is very uneven I think; it is too long, because I was to enter it in the Bloch contest, where works had to be eight minutes long, but it won a first prize anyway!

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1963

PREFACE

OVER THE years, Congregation Emanu-El of San Francisco made lasting contributions to the music of the Synagogue by commissioning and presenting for the first time the Sacred Services of Ernest Bloch, Darius Milhaud and Marc Lavry. It bestowed upon me the great honor and gave me the immeasurable joy to premiere this Service and to sponsor its publication in celebration of my Silver Jubilee as its organist and recently its choir director.

IN WRITING this work I was guided by two primary considerations based on long years of experience: the desire to provide musical settings short and concise enough to fit into the liturgical framework of the customary Sabbath Service; and the consideration for the average temple's musical personnel whose rehearsal time is frequently too limited to permit the preparation of overly difficult prayer settings.

THERE ARE many persons to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude: to Rabbi Alvin I. Fine and Rabbi Meyer Heller for their guidance and inspiration, to Cantor Joseph L. Portnoy whose beautiful singing and constant encouragement led to the completion of this work, to Cantor Reuben R. Rinder who was responsible for my affiliation with the temple and thus for the start of my musical career in this country, and to the temple choir, one of the finest vocal ensembles in the West.

LAST BUT not least, my heart-felt thanks are due to Mr. Samuel I. Jacobs, President of Congregation Emanu-El, to Mr. David L. Wolf, Chairman of its Ritual and Music Committee, to Mr. Richard L. Sloss, Past President and Chairman of the "Altman Anniversary Committee," to Mr. G. Marvin Schoenberg, Executive Secretary, whose practical assistance has been most valuable to me, and to each and every member of this beloved congregation.

San Francisco, California
January, 1963 **L. A.**

VII WORKING WITH THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

[Interview 3: April 27, 1988] ##

An Opportunity to Perform with the WPA Orchestra

Crawford: We've just begun looking through pictures of your days with the symphony, and that's what I wanted to ask you about today. When did you first begin to work with the San Francisco Symphony?

Altman: Well, actually I always had interest in the symphony even when I was a little bit younger and still in Berlin. As I mentioned, the Jewish people had their own theater and their own symphony orchestra, which was conducted by very prominent people. You might know the name of Wilhelm Steinberg, William Steinberg he called himself in this country, who was the conductor for the Pittsburgh Symphony and also, by the way, conducted our symphony very often, as well as our opera company.

One of those well-known conductors was Joseph Rosenstock, who later on became a conductor at the Met. In 1750 Bach died, and Handel died seven years later. They were both born in 1685, so 1935 was their one hundred fiftieth anniversary. Mr. Rosenstock agreed to have me play one of the Handel organ concertos with the orchestra that year and that was actually my orchestral debut.

I always was very interested in performing with an orchestra, mainly because symphonic music was the most brilliant and most intoxicating, particularly for a young man, so I was very anxious to try to establish myself in my new country by being affiliated and associated in some way with the symphony.

This went actually a little quicker than I hoped for, because of the chance to play with the WPA orchestra in 1937, as I mentioned earlier.

Altman: You remember I set great hope on the [Hammond] instrument and on the innovation, although, of course, the sound was not really like a pipe organ; it was pretty bad, but there was, on my part at least, great hope for that instrument and for its improvement, but this basic shortcoming, that it does not really sound like an organ, has made it very disliked by the entire profession.

That doesn't mean that there were not individual organists of great ability who were willing to go along under all circumstances and be sponsored, more or less, by the company itself.

Well, as it happened, Pierre Monteux liked the Hammond organ--I don't know why--and he was always with me and always wanted to hear things, and he had a Hammond organ in his home in Hancock, Maine. He played on it, and he had the idea that while it sounded very well in his home, it would not sound quite as well in a large hall because really only the softer sounds were pleasing, and to some extent imitated the pipe organ.

In a large hall it was a different story, so we organists have stayed away from electronic instruments ever since, but certainly other companies have made progress, and it is now definitely a far better instrument than the early Hammond organ, which on the other hand was a pioneering thing in the line of electric sound.

Crawford: You mentioned the WPA orchestra. I think you said Leslie Hodge conducted it then. Talk a little bit about that, please.

Altman: Well, it was a very good orchestra, and quite a few members of that orchestra went later on into the regular symphony. The situation at that time--this is 1930s--was a very bad one economically. A tremendous number of people were out of work and musicians too were badly off.

The government decided to do something about it, and so we had all kinds of artistic things, like certain people would paint walls--you know artistically, not just graffiti--and others did this and that. We in music had the good fortune to have an orchestra so that young or older musicians could have a place where they could learn the craft playing in a symphony orchestra, getting to know the repertoire, and there was some financial support, of course.

Crawford: From the government?

Altman: From the government, and this was WPA.

Crawford: Works Progress Association.

More About Alfred Hertz

Altman: Yes. They practiced and rehearsed all the time, and we in San Francisco were doubly fortunate because we had Alfred Hertz as the head of it.

Alfred Hertz then was a top-notch musician, and he came to San Francisco as a conductor of the symphony from New York, where he conducted the first performances of Parsifal outside of Bayreuth in 1903. He was a crippled man like FDR, by the way--he had polio--but he could move to some extent and he could drive very well. An extremely jovial man, and I have some pictures of him with me, if you would like to see them.

Crawford: Yes. I would. What was the fuss about the U.S. premiere of Parsifal?

Altman: Parsifal was conceived by Richard Wagner to be performed only in Bayreuth, and the reason was that he considered, and all the Bayreuth clan did so too, that it was not just an ordinary opera but sort of a religious devotional experience. In other words, it was something that went way deeper than the ordinary day-by-day opera performance, and so he decided that it should be only performed in Bayreuth.

Wagner called it Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel, which means a celebration, and it was celebrated like some religious people will celebrate the Mass, for instance. It was protected by copyright law, and that eventually ran out, because it was after all published like all other publications, and so Parsifal was occasionally staged. Nowadays, of course, they do it all the time. But right after the year 1900 it was still very daring.

Crawford: You told me how you came to meet Mrs. Hertz.

Altman: Yes. That's right--by sitting a row apart in front of her.

Crawford: You told me about the rivalry between the Hertz and the Monteux families.

Altman: Not on a personal level because they were good friends, naturally, and both so great in their ways that nobody had to be jealous of the other. So in those cases, it was the women, the wives. Not that they envied each other's looks. For instance, Mrs. Hertz was a very gaunt, tall woman, and Mrs. Monteux was a roly-poly. It was over the fame of their husbands. Of course, Monteux was more in the beginning of his career by comparison, and younger. But in any case, Monteux was not really the successor to Alfred Hertz because there was one or two years in between. There was Issay Dobrowen from 1930 to 1934.

The Trials of a Symphony Organist

Crawford: How did you formalize your relationship with the symphony in 1940?

Altman: Monteux came to my first concert, my debut concert in San Francisco, and he was brought by Mrs. Koshland. She took him to the temple, and I played nothing but Max Reger, and at the end the Passacaglia of Bach.

Monteux, after the concert was over, came up to the organ loft and said, "Ludwig, join the musicians union, and then in six months, I can make you the organist of the symphony. He was so impressed by my playing and the reason--I don't know if I was so great--was that there was not too much talent in San Francisco--I mean top-notch organists. We had a number of good organists but not many. There were, I would say, three or four.

The symphony job was always dreaded because it requires a special talent and great courage.

Crawford: Could you elaborate on that?

Altman: You have to have a lot of courage because the rehearsals are usually very short, and the organ situation is always different each time. One day you play on a four-manual organ; everything is perfect; next day, an electronic organ; the third day on God knows what.

Crawford: For rehearsals you mean?

Altman: No, no, even for concerts, too.

Crawford: Even now that they have the new Ruffatti organ?

Altman: No, no. Now everything is stabilized in Davies Hall.

Crawford: We're talking about 1940.

Altman: Also the organ parts are usually very short and always very loud. My predecessors, who were roped into playing those parts, made some dreadful, dreadful, unspeakably terrible mistakes, in other words, coming in fortissimo in another key, or coming in a little bit late. There are all kinds of things which can happen there. Even with very good players and very good musicians.

Altman: The 1812 Overture of Tchaikovsky comes to mind, where if you come in wrong, duddle duddle, duddle duddle, duddle duddle duddle duddle, duddle duddle, bom bom bom, bom, God forbid they come in with a bar too soon or too late. It's just hell!

Crawford: So you have a brief moment, and it has to be right?

Altman: That's just it. Alfred Hertz always liked to tell the story of the Lohengrin prelude where the percussionist has to strike the cymbals twice. He did it always right, but in the performance he did it wrong, and so he committed suicide. [laughter]

Crawford: Is it a true story?

Altman: No, no, no. That is just a story, but in a way, it tells you the problem there.

Crawford: Was there lots of pressure on you as the organist?

Altman: The pressure is colossal.

Crawford: So you joined the AFM, I assume?

Altman: The American Federation of Musicians? Yes, that's right.

Crawford: And then Monteux appointed you formally?

Altman: Monteux, yes, and my name was always on the membership list in the program. I was on that for over thirty years. I was only an "extra." In other words, I was never a tenured member, although through all the years I played the organ parts. I was always at the bottom line of the payroll, but it was all right; it was good. I was not like a concertmaster or anything--I was never an appointed member, but I was always on the list.

Crawford: You didn't have the union benefits then?

Altman: I had no benefits. I got paid when I played, and that was it. Today they put you on the personnel list in the program only if you are tenured, so were I to play today, I would not be on that list. I would be playing, but my name would not appear in print anywhere.

I was not the only one in this category. For instance, take the second harpist. The symphony always had two harpists, but one usually was tenured and the other one not.

Crawford: How often did you play with the symphony, more or less, in a year's time?

Altman: It depended on the conductor. The most demands on me were made by Maestro Ozawa, because I was engaged for organ parts and also for second piano and celesta parts.

Now there was a curious situation there which might have a certain interest from the social point of view. The symphony like all cultural enterprises is not like a corporation, which is dependent on profit and cannot otherwise operate. A symphony can operate very well with a deficit; not very well, but it can operate.

In the symphony that meant to be prudent and careful with spending dollars was important, and in my position as organist it resulted in the engagement of an organist only if it really was necessary. Now that is a strange thing because some composers wrote parts which they called organo ad libitum. That meant that it should have organ, but if no organ was available the piece could be played without organ. The conductor or composer could and would put in a strong demand to have the organ, even for short parts.

Crawford: Who made the decision?

Altman: The personnel manager, who has to engage all the extra players, played a part in it too. Is there something wrong in saying this?

Crawford: Not at all. One of my questions was what benefits do the musicians have today that they didn't have before?

Altman: Well, that would be one. If it says in the score and if the notes are there for the part, you get the part--to hell with the money. The conductor doesn't even have to argue anymore.

Crawford: What would they do before, simply not have the organ part?

Altman: No, the conductor always prevailed. I also pushed a little bit.

Crawford: But there used to be an argument about it.

Altman: Well, we are all peaceful people, but it was discussed. There was another thing [that] played into it. The case--have you ever heard of doubling money? You have. Well, doubling money had also a bearing on this situation, namely, you got twenty-five percent more if you played a second instrument. Now the main pianist during many years of the symphony was Reina Schivo. Her husband, by the way, is Leslie Schivo, who played the English Horn beautifully.

Altman: Reina played the violin in the orchestra, but she was also a piano player and played the piano parts for the symphony. But very often the score called for piano, and also for organ and celesta. So Reina would always get doubling pay if she played because she was a tenured member as a violinist; she would get twenty-five percent more when she played the piano part.

Then they would hire me, for instance, and then I would play organ. That would be my regular pay, plus twenty-five percent if I also played the celesta, or it could be a combination of organ and second piano, four-hand. That happens also.

For instance, the Symphony of the Psalms by Stravinsky--that has two pianos, not four-hand, but two pianos.

Crawford: Stravinsky conducted that here in 1936, I believe; his debut with the San Francisco Symphony.

Altman: Yes. That work is one of several like that. Or a lot of Bartok is that way. So, in other words, then I would be engaged with doubling pay.

Pierre Monteux: 1935-1952

Crawford: Let's talk about the conductors, because you have worked with several conductors, and Monteux was certainly an important one in terms of influencing the taste in San Francisco.

Altman: Yes. Monteux was a phenomenal musician. I would say that the only one comparable in ability that I know is Ozawa, particularly because Ozawa has a phenomenal memory, but he also has the artistry. Monteux's memory was also phenomenal: he had memorized not only the entire standard repertoire of the symphony, but also all the concertos. Also, he knew a lot about chamber music and knew it well.

To give you an example, let me tell a funny little story, and here I wish to interject once more that I hope that I don't talk too much about myself and appear as a very conceited, arrogant person. I try to tell things which are characteristic of my personal story.

Monteux went around the campuses to interest young people in music and the symphony, and he always took live musicians from the symphony to give some musical entertainment at the same time so the students would enjoy the whole thing more. On some of those occasions, I was asked by the manager of the symphony, who was Julius Haug at that time, to play.

##

Altman: Haug was the personnel manager, also the principal in the second violin section, and he was the funniest imitator of conductors. When Julius Haug entertained, he had the public in stitches, and you might as well go home if you had anything to say; you would not be a success after him.

Once I was asked to go with one of those little tours to Moraga College. And Maitre went--we called him Maitre--Maitre Monteux with his wife, who was indispensable, and that little dog, Fifi, always lying underneath the piano. Fifi made no disagreeable noises if he liked the music; at least that was the way the Monteux took it--Fifi the music critic!

I was to play the piano, which I really hadn't done to such an extent for such a long time; I was by then a 100 percent, full-time organist. As we sat down to a marvelous dinner, Maitre turned to me and said, "Ludwig, what will you play?"

Now I was scared to death because I knew I had to play from memory and I really hadn't practiced much. I didn't want to play something he would know from memory, so I decided on the F minor Fantaisie of Chopin. Tee dum, ta dee dum, ta dee dum, ta dum. So I told Maitre I thought I'd try it, and he said, "Oh, you'll do it beautifully. You know when I was in Paris, I was living next door to a pianist who learned that piece, and I heard him play it so many times that I learned it from memory." [laughter]

But Maitre was wonderful. He killed you with genuine kindness, and he loved music. He didn't listen in order to find a mistake, but because he really enjoyed listening.

Crawford: You said Mrs. Monteux was indispensable. She was always with him?

Altman: Yes. It was the olden times with a patriarchal system. In other words, the conductor could get away with things he couldn't do today. Today it's harder on the conductor and the whole thing has changed, but at that time the wife of the conductor could, for instance, sit at all the rehearsals and then dictate that the men have to wear toupees. Some of them had no hair anymore.

Crawford: She could make these kinds of decisions?

Altman: Yes, and she did.

Crawford: Was that appreciated or not?

Altman: No, it was disliked by the orchestra, hated. That's not good if the wife sits up there.

Crawford: It wouldn't be tolerated today, certainly.

Altman: It would not even occur. No, it's much more professional.

But Monteux's musicianship was overwhelming, a man who knew everything and had perfect pitch; he could actually hear it. A conductor can know the score to the last inning with all the details, but not necessarily spot what goes wrong. An orchestra finds out in one minute the strengths or shortcomings of the man with the stick; it's uncanny.

For instance, if something goes wrong, let's say, a conductor like Monteux stops the orchestra and says the second oboe should play E-flat, not E-natural. Other lesser conductors might just say simply, "Let's do that again."

Crawford: They don't know how to pinpoint the problem.

Altman: That means they don't know, yes. The orchestra doesn't mind that if there is no pretense.

Crawford: Monteux, of course, favored the French repertoire somewhat. Was he adventurous?

Altman: Yes, indeed. He is immortal because he was the musician who gave the premieres of those famous, famous ballet scores, and the most famous, of course, The Rite of Spring. Then he did Daphnis and Chloe by Ravel. That is no slouch either. Those were world premieres in Paris.

Crawford: When he was in San Francisco, did he challenge the audience?

Altman: Indeed, yes. He was one with the orchestra. Definitely, yes. Sometimes he tried to get out of conducting some of those very modern scores, and he tried to get the composer to conduct, but he didn't always get away with that.

Crawford: So many composers conducted their works during Monteux's years: Stravinsky six times, Gershwin, Schoenberg, Milhaud, Ernst Bacon, Bernstein.

Altman: Yes. I remember once he played a very modern symphony and asked the composer to conduct, and when he refused, the old man had to learn the score, which he did.

The composer came to the last rehearsal with a score. The piece ends with a solo flute and one viola and afterwards Maitre turned around to the composer and asked if it was correct the way he did it. The composer answered, "Yes, it sounded fine except at the end. The orchestra played so loud that one could not really hear the flute."

Altman: Maitre didn't say a word, but he turned around and said to the orchestra, "The orchestra is one viola." Do you get it? Nobody was playing except the flutist and one viola, and the composer said the viola was so loud that one cannot even hear the flute solo. So Maitre said to the orchestra that the composer had forgotten that at that moment the viola represented the whole orchestra. [laughter]

That reminds me of another funny thing which happened while I was still in Berlin. In one of the synagogues, the choir director and the organist didn't see eye to eye. They couldn't stand each other, and the choir director was really overbearing and unfair.

Once they rehearsed some part of the liturgy with the organist and the organist's shoe laces got untied. So he stepped away from the console and bent down to tie them and the choir conductor was with his back to him. After a minute or two, the director said, "The organ is too loud." But the organist wasn't playing at all! [laughter]

Crawford: Did Monteux have an unusual sense of humor?

Altman: Definitely. In a very quiet way.

But he was only interested in music. In my opinion he had very little interest in anything else. Music was his whole universe. It was very funny when you were with him or near him at a dinner party. He would be tapping out rhythms. He had also perfect sense of timing, and could say if the metronome were sixty-five or seventy-five. He could hit it on the spot.

Crawford: So he was working in his head--

Altman: --Completely. When he heard a story told with the punch line at the end, he would give the impression of hearing it, but he would actually not hear it. When it was over, he would turn to the person and say, "Pardon?" He had not listened at all. He was absorbed with music in his mind.

Playing on the Hammond Organ in the Opera House Instead of a Pipe Organ

Crawford: Did he have you play any of the Messiaen or the Widor organ works--any of the great French repertoire?

Altman: Yes, the most important, the Symphony for Organ of Saint-Saens. I performed it at a concert at which the very young Isaac Stern played the Mendelssohn, and I played the organ for the Saint-Saens Symphony, and at the beginning of the program also one of the Handel concertos on the Hammond organ. I got very complimentary reviews for that.

Crawford: The Saint-Saens you played on the pipe organ?

Altman: No, also the Hammond. It was also on the same program.

Crawford: Did they have just a Hammond organ then?

Altman: Yes. Miserable in the opera house. You know the chandelier? Instead of the chandelier there should have been an organ. Did you know that?

Crawford: I had heard that, yes, but it was too expensive.

Altman: I think it was $35,000 for an organ for the opera house, which they badly needed, and instead they spent the money on that chandelier. But they built speaking alcoves--

Crawford: --For pipes.

Altman: For pipes. There was supposed to be a real pipe organ.

Yes. Scandalous, it was. They now have nothing but a Baldwin organ, which is no great shakes. But they could have at least bought top-notch equipment for the opera house. The best available electronic organ could have been installed, and it would have been much better than those which they imported.

Crawford: So they brought an organ in. Was Monteux happy with that?

Altman: Yes, he had a Hammond in him home in Maine, as I said, and he evidently liked it, and on that thing I had to play.

I will never forget Dimitri Mitropulos-- Do you remember Dimitri Mitropulos?

Crawford: I never heard him.

Altman: Oh, he was the most marvelous person on earth, almost like a saint, a wonderful idealist. He had, I have a notion, a very broad-minded intellectual capacity.

Crawford: And he was a guest conductor?

Altman: Yes. He was the regular conductor for Minneapolis for the symphony there and then in New York for the New York Philharmonic. He died very young, and it's a real pity. He could conduct all the modern stuff.

Now you might ask how come I can tell all those stories since I'm really, as our symphony goes, a very small potato. The reason is Naoum Blinder our concertmaster at the time.

I played for most of his students and [interruption] sometimes he invited conductors to his home for supper. I would sit at the same table, very often next to the conductor, because it was thought that I would be interesting to the conductor, to Monteux or whomever, because of my background and my interests in all phases of music. So I had those opportunities thrown at me. I could never arrange anything like that by myself!

Crawford: So you got to know them a little bit personally.

Altman: Yes, if only very little. By the way, in my dealings with very important people, I never abused the privilege. In other words, I would not pester them because I had been with them once or a second or third time. I felt a sense of responsibility for their time.

Crawford: Well, Monteux you must have been very close to?

Altman: Yes.

Crawford: Did they socialize, the Monteux?

Altman: Yes, but only musically. The big shots, money givers--this I don't know.

Crawford: What about the money givers? I think Mr. Skinner was very good at that.

Altman: Yes, but that was his job. And then under him was Joe Scafidi. For the pops concerts in summer at the civic auditorium it was Joe Dyer as impresario and the famous Arthur Fiedler as conductor.

Enrique Jorda: 1952-1963

Crawford: Shall we move on to the next conductors? We could talk about Maestro Jorda.

Altman: Jorda was, in a way, a sad case in that he went in like a lion and came out like a beaten lamb. And let me say at the outset that I'm one of his admirers mainly because I feel the critics were unfair--and in this case critics were not only the handful of professional critics but the audience at large. When we set ourselves up as critics, [we] must weigh the situation carefully. This was not done in Jorda's case at all. The abysmal ending was, in my opinion, unpardonable and totally unfair.

One strong side of Maestro Jorda was his appreciation of and excellent work with choirs. He was eminently talented as a choir conductor, and that added something almost totally neglected before he came.

I heard Monteux express that a Bach Passion--I almost even hate to say it now after my expressions of the genuine affection and admiration for Maitre--but he said it himself that he was bored by the choral masterworks of Bach.

Crawford: How could that be?

Altman: Because at that time the great conductors performed Baroque music, if it was given, in a romantic way. If Liszt played Bach's music, he would play an adaptation by Liszt.

Crawford: But Jorda played it as it was meant to be performed?

Altman: Much more so, yes. Today we go even further. But at least he performed it.

He was also outstanding in Spanish music, not that it is the greatest contribution to the history of music, but it is a contribution. He was excellent for local musicians, and you could always talk to him. He was like a father.

The mistakes he made were all resolvable, but nobody knew how to approach him on his technical shortcomings. For instance when we did Berlioz, which basically he did very well. There are certain places where you can just beat in a certain way, which were very easy, but he would not know that and would not do it, and nobody would dare go up to him because [he] would risk his job.

Crawford: Was it the musicians who were discontented with Jorda?

Altman: Yes, the musicians, because he did not know the scores. The reason why he didn't was also not entirely his fault. He came from a small situation in Capetown in South Africa.

When he first came, he knew his scores very well, but later he was overwhelmed by our awfully long seasons. He said he had to conduct eighty-plus concerts a season and he just could not, in my opinion, learn those tons and tons of scores. In the case of other conductors, it was evidently possible. In the case of Jorda, after a while he had exhausted what he did in Capetown and wherever he was before and he was just overwhelmed by this immense task. Usually people in the top jobs have the necessary stamina.

I invited Jorda to the Temple to see my organ and you know what I discovered? That he was an organ student of Marcel Dupré. Nobody knew that. Dupré also had played a recital at my Temple.

Then Jorda said suddenly, "Do you by any chance know Gunther Pulvermacher?" I said, "Not only do I know him, we went to school together." We passed the final examination together for the so-called Abitur. Jorda said, "He was my best friend in Capetown. Actually his wife and my wife--they are bosom friends."

So that was my introduction to Jorda. When he came here, you have no idea how much enthusiasm he created after Monteux, but at the end he began to bore the audience. Our audience in San Francisco is wonderful and all that, but fickle. You can only stay popular for so long.

Crawford: Is that so?

Altman: Yes.

Crawford: And what happened with Monteux--did the critics get down on him?

Altman: Yes. For instance, Monteux would make a correction in the orchestra, but would not insist strongly on discipline. And now, by contrast, came the young, very enthusiastic, ebullient--

Crawford: Latin.

Altman: Latin, yes. He always busted a button, and things like that. I remember the first concerts he gave he gave the "Liebestöd" and also a Haydn symphony that was absolutely gorgeous. He was received with the highest approval possible.

Crawford: San Francisco likes stars.

Altman: He was not much of a star at that moment because he was really not too well known, but then he became a star. You are absolutely correct; that is very common.

The first year they call the year of discovery or something like that, when he bowled everybody over--the orchestra also, and they played with a finesse and a refinement derived from his wonderful articulation as an organist.

An organist has to be very, very sensitive to sound. That's our main thing. The sound and the contrast in sound and the balances and all that, and he had that because he could not have been a pupil of Dupré if he didn't have it. Dupré was the greatest teacher there was in the whole world. But then, gradually, the nemesis set in.

Another of Jorda's good points was the interest he took in local composers. He took an interest in their scores and conducted quite a few of them: Sheinfeld, Imbrie, Emmanuel Leplin, and many others.

Crawford: The audience supported that too--doing new works by local composers?

Altman: Yes. But their support decreased. You could just sense it. Then there was the other thing: he was an extremely gregarious person; he just loved people and would sit there all night and talk. He was very fond of talking to professors, musicologists about the scholarly aspects of music. That was his niche.

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Crawford: Talk more about Jorda if you like.

Altman: It is a dangerous thing, in conducting a major symphony like ours, to talk because the players never want anybody to tell them anything. You must never talk to the orchestra--express everything in your conducting, or if you have to talk, absolutely the shortest, most direct way.

Crawford: So he talked too much?

Altman: Completely. In other words, their idea is the conductor at the most should say, "Louder, or softer, faster, or slower." I am overstating, of course.

Crawford: How did the discontent manifest itself?

Altman: --"don't give me such a bad time." That would be roughly the situation.

Altman: The final blow, that even cost Frankenstein his job, came when Szell wrote a letter of answer to Frankenstein's letter and mailed both to the Examiner, stating that the San Francisco Symphony under Jorda was the poorest he had ever seen anywhere. Instead of answering this letter with another letter, he was so furious at the request that Jorda conduct in Cleveland he published the whole thing in public.

Frankenstein was kicked out of the Chronicle as a music critic and he became then the art critic.

Crawford: Why was Frankenstein so pro-Jorda?

Altman: Because Frankenstein is cut from the same cloth. That is a different kind of mentality, and basically I sympathize with that. Jorda had that bigger, expansive world picture and musical knowledge. Not the technical perfection but feeling and knowledge behind that.

But you see, somebody could have told him the conducting flaws. All he had to be told would have been, "Don't spend so many gregarious hours with people who are of interest to you, even if that includes Ludwig Altman. Study the scores. Sit there. Study, study, study, not only the melody, but everything. If you have problems, if the boys don't seem to follow correctly, ask some experienced person to go over [it]."

Crawford: But nobody said that to him?

Altman: Who could? The concertmaster, Mr. Blinder, couldn't do it because he developed some problems with his vision and had to quit the symphony. He was really in between the members of the orchestra and the conductor, so under certain conditions, he could have gone to the conductor and helped heal the situation.

Crawford: With whom was Jorda popular?

Altman: With local composers, music professors, historians who idolized him. It was a dirty shame that Jorda was given no credit for his programming--unknown classics, choral masterworks, Spanish music, his interest in works of local composers.

Crawford: So Jorda was released.

Altman: Yes, it was very sad. It was so acrimonious.

Mrs. Jorda did not come to San Francisco any more. They have a beautiful home in Brussels, and I think now he's retired. He wrote a book, by the way, How to Conduct a Symphony Rehearsal. I'm very curious to read that. He wrote it for Pelican publications.

Josef Krips: 1963-1970

Crawford: So then after that, we had Maestro Krips.

Altman: Now when Krips came--I still remember the first rehearsal--I was backstage, just very curious [about] what he was like. Our personnel manager was Al White, a violist. I approached White and White said with great sincerity, "He is absolutely first-class."

Krips proved to be that way. You know that he was taller than you would have thought when you saw pictures of him, very heavyset, constantly smoking. Whenever Krips was in, the whole neighborhood smelled. [laughter]

He was very religious, and his faith illumined his conducting vocal music. It was a pity that he did not conduct opera in San Francisco. Emmy and I heard him do Zauberflöte (Magic Flute) in Wiesbaden with the entire personnel of the Vienna State Opera and he was fabulous.

I still remember that first year--he had never met me, and I was scared that he might have [reservations]--I don't know for what reason. Then we met him by chance and he was charming, and so I thought he might really enjoy seeing the beautiful organ which I had at the Temple; so he came and I played for him, and I think he liked it very much and began hiring me.

By the way, regarding Monteux. When he came to Temple Emanu-El to hear me play, after he had heard my debut concert, I played for him the Schoenberg Variations on a Recitative. That is about the meanest thing there is in organ music, up to now. I'm still the only organist in the Bay Area who has learned that piece. I tried my darndest to have this and that organist learn it, and some have begun learning it, but nobody [did]--the trouble is that it is, particularly in the initial part, the hardest. The second half or so, or at least the last third, is simple by contrast.

But, in any case, for Krips, it was Mozart. It was very easy after Monteux because there was not too much organ use, not too much piano either because it was a much more traditional program, needing few extra players.

Crawford: Much more nineteenth-century music under Jorda?

Altman: Yes, but Monteux knew all that, too. But for Krips, that was his bread and butter. That is how he grew up, after all. Monteux grew up with Debussy, with that circle.

Crawford: So the French really made more of the keyboard in their music?

Altman: Yes, the nineteenth century in organ is the revival of the organ as an instrument, particularly through the famous Cavaille-Coll. That is the most important organ company of the nineteenth century. There were all kinds of organs all over, of course, but that was the newest trend, the Cavaille-Coll type.

Crawford: For whom did you play the most after Monteux?

Altman: Ozawa. But mostly that was on celesta. I played far more celesta than before. Krips did sometimes put in organ. For instance, I played the Creation of Haydn with organ, and [he] put the organ in. Oh, yes, the masses. Whenever Krips did works with choir, he liked to have organ there. I did a lot of music that way. I played actually quite often under him, but I don't remember all of the pieces.

Crawford: What was he like as a conductor?

Altman: Well, he was of the school which was one generation before mine, although he was born in 1902. When he came to us, he must have been in his sixties, upper sixties. He was a real authoritarian man but with great charm, businesslike and very religiously inclined. I really think that his faith meant a great deal to him. He went through a very disturbed period as a very, very young opera conductor, and here there were some problems with the Nazi regime, some real problems because one of his parents was Jewish in the eyes of the Nazi regime.

I think he lost his position in Karlsruhe and then he went back to Vienna where there were problems. He was not deprived of a livelihood completely, but he could not conduct. I don't know if it was at the Staatsoper or the other opera company or the symphony orchestra. He made his living coaching singers, I think, mostly. He was permitted to do that, and, of course, after the Hitler horror was over, he began again, I believe, in Buffalo.

You know that his wife died rather suddenly and that he married Henrietta, a Viennese girl who was with the Kripses as a companion to Mrs. Krips. When Mrs. Krips died, evidently the feelings of the younger companion and Maestro Krips came to the fore, and they got married. He told me it seemed to be the natural thing; it was like preordained.

I remember tremendous performances under him, like the Ninth (from memory!) or the Mozart Mass at St. Ignatius on his seventieth birthday or Bruckner's Third Symphony.

Altman: Unfortunately, at the moment of his greatest triumphs he contracted cancer, which felled him.

Crawford: What was his repertoire like?

Altman: His repertoire was basically the regular German/Austrian Furtwängler program, like von Karajan would conduct. They did everything--the older things like Bach were done but not with the last degree of stylistic accuracy--and they went up to the young Stravinsky.

Crawford: A fairly limited range?

Altman: Yes, but the limited range was the right range for Austria and for Germany and for Holland and for Scandinavia.

The Kripses were friendly towards us, and they always took an interest whenever I played in Switzerland. They have a home in Montreux on Lake Geneva and there they would invite us.

Sometimes when I played a concert there, they threw a little party for us afterwards, and the last year of his life, when he was already in very bad health, we were invited to afternoon cafe. Mrs. Krips went down to the café patisserie, Konditorei, and bought cake, and he made the coffee. He opened the door when we came, and we knew we would not see him after that anymore, yet he was still doing quite well on that afternoon and was anticipating many conducting opportunities and recordings. He had no axe to grind anymore, and he felt good in talking to somebody who could understand him.

At that point he had better contracts than ever before to do big, big, big things in the central musical circles of the world. What I remember the most is that he was to record all of the Mozart symphonies for the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. With the Paris Opera he had Cosi fan tutte coming with Margaret Price. One big job after another. He knew everything that he was supposed to conduct, and on which day, and he probably also knew he would not do them.

We spoke at great length about the relationship between an orchestra and its conductor, and he said that his kind of conductor was going out. The idea that a conductor sits in the same place all year long and conducts constantly the same orchestra and has the same responsibility for how to get the money, how to get the publicity, how to get the soloist, how to get the programs, was becoming intolerable to him.

Seiji Ozawa: 1970-1977

Crawford: Well, let's talk about Ozawa then. He's the last one you worked under, I believe.

Altman: Under him it was absolutely stunning. He did really modern things. It was a radically changed program because of that. Then with Ozawa, the charm of him as a person as well as his excellent memory, also his musical ear was absolutely marvelous. So when he came he could do no wrong and he did not do wrong. The program became modern, including for the first time Japanese music, which we never had heard before. He could bring the thing off.

He could, for instance, have a rehearsal--the last rehearsal is always Wednesday morning--and in the evening he would conduct the whole thing from memory.

Crawford: Are San Francisco audiences more interested in modern music than most?

Altman: Yes. I ascribe our climate to that. I think that the climate has a far greater influence on the lives and on the thinking of people than anything else. We have a benign climate, and we have basically a more benign attitude towards each other than those who live under rougher temperatures.

Crawford: Does that make more people willing to be in the theater, to go to the theater?

Altman: I would say, yes. Living in New York with all those blizzards, would you rather stay in or out?

But speaking of Ozawa, I had increased activity under him, and I knew that I would not maintain it much longer because it just was not possible for me to be away from my job at the Temple so often.

The orchestra has always had Saturday morning rehearsals, the first rehearsal of the next week's program. And the next rehearsals were Tuesday morning and afternoon, two rehearsals. And on Wednesday morning the last rehearsal for Wednesday night, which was the first performance. That gave the players Sunday and Monday free. Under Krips, this was fine for me because Krips needed me so much less often, so my absences on Saturday mornings were less frequent.

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Altman: —I would ask, "Could you spare me for the Saturday morning rehearsal? I have this or that big service to do at the Temple." And Mr. Krips gave me permission. But frankly with Ormandy I didn't dare to ask him. He was so new, and also he was younger. With Krips, it was easier.

Crawford: What was your rehearsal schedule at the Temple?

Altman: Saturday morning is the main service, and the last year I played with the orchestra I had to stay away from the Temple seven to nine weeks in succession.

Crawford: So you had to get someone else to play the service?

Altman: Yes, and that is not easy because it's not the playing alone: you have to conduct the choir; you have to know the service; it's a pain in the neck to train somebody else.

Crawford: But, of course, Temple Emanu-El, not the symphony was your main job?

Altman: Absolutely, the only place where I had security, health insurance, a pension plan and paid vacations. I had no security any other place.

Crawford: What did it mean to you, the symphony post?

Altman: A lot. I enjoyed immensely the affiliation with so many excellent colleagues. I enjoyed very much the many conductors whom I heard and saw from the other side, which is the right side from the orchestra's point of view. I always enjoyed the music. It's overwhelming to sit and hear when you sit right in the orchestra. You don't hear everything in proportion correctly, but the overall sound is intoxicating. It was just good to be seen sitting on stage, especially prestige-wise.

Crawford: But it wasn't a big item of income for you?

Altman: No. It couldn't be since I averaged only between twenty-five to thirty concerts a season. I played all organ parts, of course, and whenever the score required two piano parts I would play second piano and celesta. The first piano was played by Reina Schive.

Crawford: Which of all the conductors you heard would you call a musician's conductor?

Altman: Definitely Milhaud among others. I would say the great conductors are much calmer and much less radical than you would think, judging from the way their music is.

A Meeting with Leonard Bernstein and Playing with Artur Rodzinski

Crawford: You performed under Bernstein--how is he?

Altman: Bernstein is a case by himself. He does many things which normally an orchestra would resent. He is too explosive; he jumps around and he changes his facial expressions. He acts up a little too much, but he gets away with it because his mastery of the music is absolute. He is in every respect as tremendous a conductor as Ozawa and I cannot deny that he had great ability and experience and genuine originality.

So I have the greatest admiration for him and only two or three years ago I had a personal experience with him. I was invited to play an organ recital at Grace Cathedral. The invitation came from my colleague John Fenstermaker, who now plays the organ parts for the symphony.

One day I was practicing for my program, and I was practicing a piece by Stockhausen for the organ called Zodiac. All of a sudden, I heard footsteps in the back, which I disliked immensely because they always disturb you in your practice. But they came closer and closer, and then finally who was it? Bernstein. I was flabbergasted. He asked, "What are you playing?" "Stockhausen." Then we talked, and he said he had a concert that evening with the Vienna Philharmonic, which he brought over for a U.S. tour.

I said to Mr. Bernstein that I had played under him when he conducted our San Francisco orchestra in a Bartok work. He remembered that, and then he said to me, "Are you coming to my concert tonight?" We didn't plan to go frankly because it was frightfully expensive, I think, $120 or $130 a seat. So I said, "We haven't decided yet," which was really not a very polite, accurate reply. He said, "If you want to come, I will leave a ticket for you in the back with the custodian because you cannot buy any--it's completely sold out." I thanked him profusely, and said, "Would it be possible--my wife loves music." So he said quickly, "I will leave two seats for the two of you." And he did.

Crawford: That's a very warm story.

Altman: That is the way he is. He's a real humanitarian which we call a Mensch, and I think everybody knows and feels that way.

Crawford: And then you played under Artur Rodzinski?

Altman: Yes, in King David by Honegger. Rodzinski was a wonderful conductor but moody, so the rehearsal went badly. To break the unhappy spell, the Maestro told a funny story about how he had just conducted the Mexico City orchestra and got ill during rehearsal, so they gave him time to rest and swallow a pill.

Rehearsal resumed, but again the Maestro's heart trouble forced him to stop and take another pill. Finally, after receiving a pill for the third time, the pill "took" and Rodzinski asked who the fine doctor was. "I am no doctor," the man answered. "I am the undertaker!"

The "Hocus-Pocus" about Conductors

Crawford: You said the audience got tired after a honeymoon with each of the conductors. Was that true of all of them?

Altman: The later ones all quit on their own before it came to that. You know the international celebrities have a very easy time now because they are so much in demand and it's much easier for them to leave. I can understand that.

Crawford: Conductors who take several orchestras, do they conduct as well?

Altman: Better. It's an awful lot of hocus-pocus in that whole thing. When, for instance, our big moneymakers speak of "world class" orchestras, that is absolute baloney.

Crawford: Why?

Altman: Because it cannot be. Let's say we want to play against Seattle. Let's say the next time we want to be compared with Los Angeles. So we improve like hell, but the others are as smart as we are in improving. They can just as soon go up from their level like we do. Isn't that logical? Are we not like the proverbial driver who always wants to pass the drivers in front?

Crawford: But you're saying it's not necessary for a conductor to be resident in a city and perform week after week?

Altman: Absolutely not. The opera company, for instance, never has a resident conductor. Even Sir John Pritchard today doesn't act as one; he's away all the time. If they have a good conductor, they instantly play like an excellent orchestra. That is the main thing. The job of a symphony orchestra, the conditio sine qua non is to interpret the great music written for this ensemble, for a very large sophisticated ensemble.

Crawford: So it is the choice of programming which is the most important?

Altman: Yes. Those who have subscribed to the symphony for ten-twelve seasons should know this repertoire in detail. If that's not so, if they only have heard the same number of selected masterworks, the orchestra has failed to live up to what it is all about. The main thing is the repertoire.

VIII MORE ABOUT TEMPLE EMANU-EL

[Interview 4: May 9, 1988]##

The Place of Music in the Jewish Service

Crawford: Let us begin by talking more about music in the temple.

Altman: You have touched upon a vast subject, Caroline, so let us anticipate a long chapter right here, not begrudging the time it may take.

First, the general background of Jewish music. As you know, there are three different religious organizations representing the majority of America's Jewry: Reform, Conservative and Orthodox. Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco belongs to the first group, the Reform group, comprising about seven hundred fifty congregations with a total membership of well over a million members.

Almost all congregations have a cantor, sometimes with a volunteer choir. Bigger temples usually have additionally an organist, and the biggest, like ours, have a professional choir capable of performing anything that has been composed for the Jewish liturgy. This is the usual, so that most synagogues have fine music.

As with everything else in life some temples are more equal than others. Our temple has the reputation, and I believe it is a justified one, of being a leader in the field of music through the vast range of repertoire, the quality of our vocal ensemble and most of all, the fact that Temple Emanu-El has consistently pioneered in the realm of commissioning new works from the genius of living Jewish composers.

The Relationship between Cantor and Organist

Crawford: What was the relationship between the cantor and you as organist? Who conducted the choir, picked the music, and hired and fired the singers?

Altman: Caroline, you put the finger, or rather all your fingers, on the problems as they come up in every case. I believe that to answer your question one must go back to the 1930s when there was a renaissance of Jewish liturgical music taking place here in the United States with composers like Abraham Binder, who was also a first-rate administrator, Isadore Freed, Max Helfman, Lazar Saminsky and Lazar Weiner, to mention just a few. Many synagogues had no cantor; often one of the choir singers would be singing the more traditional chants and be called "cantorial soloist."

Something similar happened in Germany at the same time. Under the pressure of the Nazi regime, many young musicians found their way back to Jewish values and that included a heightened concern for a renewal of the shopworn liturgy.

Crawford: Would you mention some names?

Altman: Gladly, since many of them found asylum in the United States and in Australia. There was Heinrich Schalit, Hugo Adler and his son, Samuel Adler, Erwin Jospe, Max Janowsky, Oskar Guttmann, Janot Roskin, Herman Berlinsky, Werner Bar, Hermann Schildberger, Herbert Fromm, Ludwig Altman. In many instances we had to learn or perfect our technique by playing the organ.

Crawford: But who was playing the organs in the Reform temples before all this?

Altman: A good question, easily answered. Because even in the Reform temples (it really should be called "liberal"), no Jew was permitted to play the organ; it was considered a mechanism like, say, an automobile or streetcar, so there were always Christian organists employed. This ended when the Nazis, possibly fearing that the Christian musicians might become contaminated, made them quit their synagogue jobs, thereby opening positions for Jewish musicians.

Back to your question about the cantor-organist relationship. As I said before, it changed from situation to situation. Cantor Rinder had problems to overcome, as beloved and supported as he was by the members. There is no need to go into detail here. Since he was unable to sing, after all the main activity of a cantor, he was given the title of musical director.

Altman: There was a tacit compromise that I would direct the choir while playing the organ part, but that Cantor Rinder would select the music as well as audition the vocalists. I could live with this arrangement very nicely, first out of gratitude to him who handed me the job outright and who introduced much new material to me.

In reality my position was not an easy one since he also insisted on conducting the rehearsals so that I had to take charge and accept responsibility for services which I had never rehearsed.

Luckily, the choir had total understanding of the setup and cooperated beautifully. Even at the Holy Day Services of 1938 (when I had to do them for the first time) there was no rehearsal time allotted and you can imagine my feelings when the young, then unknown, Erich Leinsdorf attended services, sitting on the organ bench with me!

There was something else and as I look back it all becomes vivid in my memory. I never have spoken about this point, namely that I could and did indeed have the strongest possible desire to have plenty of time and energy to devote my talent as much as possible to musical activities outside the synagogue and its music. My greatest wish and ambition was to stay in the much larger field of general music, and I had no inclination to have my job at Emanu-El turn into a full-time job which might preclude or limit my outside music-making.

Crawford: You mentioned your interest in music apart from the organ.

Altman: Yes, I always loved to play the piano, mainly because of the literature, so unbelievably superior to the organ repertoire.

Beginning in 1946, Naoum Blinder asked me to become the accompanist for his students, coaching them at the same time. He had a wonderful class and many of his students became members of our symphony. Others like David Abel preferred chamber music.

Mr. Blinder was an absolutely first-class teacher, and this gave me an idea of the violin concerto repertoire and brought me before the public, since many of the students gave recitals attended by the critics.

If the cantor had worried about my wanting to run the music at the Temple, all my outside activities--church jobs, the orchestra, the Bach Festival and the summer tours--would have shown the contrary. So while all this worked so well for me at Emanu-El, the combination of a cantor and a musically ambitious young Jewish organist could have produced problems, particularly if the organist expected to be and became musical director.

Crawford: Is this perhaps a reason for the shortage of Jewish organists?

Altman: I think so. As I mentioned, in the thirties quite a few young musicians from Germany came over here at the ideal moment, because synagogue music underwent a change and new music was created, performed and accepted. Now music in the synagogue means something different again, a much simpler form of musical presentation, more folkloristic, more repetitious, always having the cantor run the show, which automatically "demotes" the organist.

Cantor Rinder and the Commissioning of Works

Crawford: Was Cantor Rinder substantially responsible for the music programs at Emanu-El?

Altman: Yes. To fill you in, let me give a short description of his life. He came as a two-year-old to the United States, to the East Coast, like so many Jews. In 1913 he was called from there to San Francisco as cantor of our Temple. He was instantly recognized for his artistry and his wonderful personality. He had a rare gift of making people find solace and relief from anguish just by talking to him.

Like almost always in life there were problems to face. One of them, actually the only one in this context, was the fact that he had vocal problems which increased with time, so much so that he had to give up singing in the regular form, replacing it with some recitation helped along by mostly improvised organ music.

Unfortunately, there was no real chanting possible, but there was a wonderful baritone, Stanley Noonan, a Catholic who learned the traditional melodies. Stan had a true feeling for this different kind of music and I wonder if Congregation Emanu-El had a full appreciation of the contributions he made through his approximately forty years.

Crawford: I understand Cantor Rinder had a fine baritone voice as a young man.

Altman: I never heard him sing out, as his vocal illness prevented it. The Cantor mentioned the name of his illness to me repeatedly; it was one of those mysterious, difficult-to-remember foreign words.

Musically speaking, the role of the recitant became popular again through the cantor's introducing a special part into the score, so that his participation in the performance of the service was assured.

Altman: He instructed those composers to whom he gave commissions to write services or to provide a special line which he called recitant. And so he would have that at least for a music background, and he could even get by with those suggestions with people like Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud.

Crawford: Was that a limitation? Did it diminish the music somehow?

Altman: No. In those cases, he had the music also for a cantor, but he didn't call it the cantor, it was a baritone soloist.

Crawford: You mentioned with the Milhaud commission that you thought it was somewhat makeshift and not as strong as it might have been.

Altman: No, to my mind, the real weakness of the Milhaud in that respect is that the underpinning or the background music is very weak music. It doesn't really stand up to anything.

But it's only a small part. Mostly, it is choral music, which is mostly again in Hebrew. The recitant doesn't recite all the time and doesn't in all things. Mostly towards the end and usually the final blessings involved him much more, but there is still a complete part for a baritone soloist, for which we used always one of the singers in the choir. These people usually were not Jewish. It was very difficult to find Jewish choir singers. [Stanley Noonan was in the choir.]

The Temple Choir

Crawford: You had a large choir, I understand, and then a hundred volunteers on top of it.

Altman: Yes, well that was only for the star performances like when the Milhaud was given in its premiere, its very first performance, then we had a large choir. Those figures I don't know. I don't know what the actual counts were. We always had our choir and then usually in quite a few of those, we got the chorus from Cal.

Crawford: Did you work with the choir, or did Cantor Rinder?

Altman: It depended. Now when we had those Jewish services, no. What happened was I had to prepare our professional choir--we had only a professional choir, even now every service is a professional choir. There are no Jewish singers in it.

Crawford: It's unusual.

Altman: And this is a pretty well-paid job.

Crawford: Why is that so?

Altman: Well, the Jewish singers--I don't know--they also couldn't get a successor to my own job who was Jewish.

Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Temples

Crawford: I wanted to ask you about the difference in the music in the different temples: Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative.

Altman: Well, the Orthodox has only a cantor and maybe a male choir. It depends again on who the cantor is and where he comes from. You see so many Jewish people are here in the first generation. And so the people who came from the Orthodox and the Conservative, particularly brought their own Eastern melodies with them. And then it all depends where they came from, et cetera.

The Conservative is the same way, but part of them will have organ music, too. But they also will mostly have only male singers, not four-part singing, and use those singers in lieu, as it was, of an organ. In other words, instead of the organist playing a chorus, they would sing a chorus.

The big Reform temples, of course, that is the one to which Emanu-El belongs, have mixed choir, organ, and a cantor. Now when I came from Berlin, there were many, many Reform temples that had no cantor. That was even more Reform than what you might think of, and only [in] late years have the cantors made a tremendous comeback and are much more important.

Now, all temples have cantors. That is very recent. Many, many temples, even the biggest of them all, the Temple Emanu-El in New York, have now something like a cantor. They don't want to be so reformed that they have a full-time cantor, but they do have now a man who takes, so to speak, the position of a cantor, without being called that.

But since there are not enough cantors available, they have now gone a step further and have installed girls who go to that school where they train them.

Crawford: They have a cantor school?

Altman: In New York, and probably elsewhere too. But the big one is in New York, and that is under the heading of Reform Judaism as a whole. You know, there are about seven hundred synagogues under that roof with a membership of over a million. They have a

Altman: school where they train the girls now alongside the boys. There are so many, and they are so outstanding that they rule the whole field. If that continues like that-- [laughter]

Crawford: Do you approve?

Altman: Wholeheartedly! Well, I like girls anyway.

Crawford: So it's in the more modern church where you find more music?

Choosing Soloists

Altman: Yes, because they have the facilities. Now we always had marvelous singers, and Cantor Rinder had a good knack for picking good singers and if I might blow my own horn, I do too. I have brought many, many singers very great careers. To mention a few names, the latest one that becomes a star right now is Luana De Vol. I picked her for the Temple.

Crawford: She has a career in Germany.

Altman: I helped her too; I gave her lots of instruction. For instance, I told her what the keys are, what the tonalities are called. She can no longer say, "A flat." She remembers that A flat major is As-dur.

Crawford: Oh, you taught her so that she could adapt?

Altman: Sure, that way she could get coaching lessons. The coaches are German.

Crawford: Did she sing in the Temple for you?

Altman: Yes. I picked her. She was my soprano.

Once I was called by Farberman--you know the conductor in Oakland? I should have the Mahler [prepared], the last movement of Herr Mahler, Eighth Symphony, in three days. The organist got sick or got cold feet or whatever. So all right. I hated it because I had to go at night. They all rehearse at night.

Crawford: In the Paramount?

Altman: No. It was elsewhere.

Crawford: It was before the Paramount?

Altman: Yes. I had a terrible Baldwin organ to boot; it was awful. Well, I really was all right. There was another person who stepped in, in the same performance and it was Luana. The Mahler has quite a few soprano parts. So I heard the girl for the first time. And the first opening I had, I engaged her.

IX COMMISSIONING NEW WORKS

Ernest Bloch and Frederick Jacobi

Crawford: Let's talk a little bit more in depth about these commissions. Was that kind of a musical renaissance within the Temple Emanu-El?

Altman: Yes.

Crawford: I wanted to know about Ernest Bloch first of all, his 1928 commission.

Altman: Well, he was one of the great. I personally don't go for the "great." We have no measurement, but I would say he is one of the great composers of his day. In the first place, he did not only compose the sacred service for the Jews.

Crawford: No. What place did his service have within his music?

Altman: A high place. I think it is one of the surviving pieces he composed.

Crawford: Is it performed still?

Altman: By Jewish people, yes.

Crawford: So that was a contribution to the literature?

Altman: Definitely. A mainstay. It was much better than that because since there is nothing else of equal stature, it's definitely of central importance to us. There is one hitch in the service, and that is that he composed it like it was an oratorio. In other words, it goes continuously on. It can replace the service as it goes because it contains all the prayers.

Crawford: So you have to interrupt it.

Altman: Yes. And that is not easily done because you never have real authentic endings of anything. In many cases, we should go on where we have to stop because something else occurs.

Crawford: Well, Frankenstein, when he reviewed it, said it was the first organic symphonic setting of the Jewish liturgy. Is that what you're referring to, the fact that it was more of a piece?

Altman: Yes. Now the other one, the Milhaud, is a little bit better. There you have a similar situation--that it goes on when it should be finished, and that limits a little bit its liturgical use, but we make use of it even though it's not perfect.

Crawford: One of the people who wrote for the service in 1931 was Frederick Jacobi. Although he wasn't commissioned, was he a member of the congregation?

Altman: No. He was a composer in New York. He's a San Franciscan, but he was not living here.

Crawford: He said he thought Bloch and Milhaud had their eyes on the concert stage as well as the altars. Would that explain what you are saying, that they wanted a piece that could be done by an orchestra?

Altman: Well, the fact that it is orchestrated has nothing to do with the structure. Jacobi, I met also. He gave some operatic thing at Stanford. He died when he was sixty-two years old, I remember, and his piece was, to my ears, just charming.

I congratulated him and said, "It charmed me so much and it put me in a good mood; it was humorous," and he was enchanted. He said, "That is the most wonderful thing you say, because I'm always taken as a modern composer and [considered] hard to listen to!" So my reaction pleased him.

Crawford: What did he write for the Temple?

Altman: He wrote a service. We have a whole service by him, and we have given pieces from it. His vocal writing is very simple music by today's standards; you just read it off. It is alive. To my ears, it was always in a very peculiar, clumsy way, original. He had those endless long, low notes in all voices, and then he had an obsession that on almost every downbeat, there is nothing going on except the pedal. You know it stops the flow and makes many pauses where there should be music. There was not enough counterpoint, not only in the strict Bach style, but some sort of something going on. But it has its good points also. I had chosen quite a few of those pieces to perform.

Crawford: Did you know Mr. Bloch when he lived and worked at the San Francisco Conservatory?

Altman: No, I never met Bloch.

Darius Milhaud's Sacred Service

Crawford: I know you knew Mr. and Mrs. Milhaud. Could you talk about them a little bit?

Altman: Yes. Milhaud was, in my opinion, a composer who was just a composer. He was a very genial man--a real Frenchman. His music, to my ears, has always reflected that.

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Altman: It was difficult to know his opus because of the unbelievably large number of works he composed. I was several times privileged and always enjoyed it when I heard large works of his performed. Now in the 1930s, I remember hearing his Christopher Columbus in the state opera at Berlin, conducted by the eminent Erich Kleiber.

Cantor Rinder was most successful in commissioning Darius Milhaud to compose a Sacred Service for our congregation. He was at the zenith of his fame and musical inspiration, invited right and left to conduct, and swamped with offers to write music. This had the disadvantage that Milhaud could and would write too quickly, relying on his enormous technique and facility to see him through.

Cantor Rinder knew this and was anxious to impress on Milhaud the need for at least one section to be of large proportion, counterpoint, but how to proceed? He was afraid that the great man would resent such interference.

After deliberation Rinder decided to point out to him the special importance of a setting of the Torah Service, which should stand out musically to conform with the liturgical highlights. Milhaud saw the light and obliged him.

Crawford: Did Milhaud also talk about his composing David for Jerusalem?

Altman: Yes, there was a party at the Rinder home, which was just one block from Emanu-El. I certainly did not miss the opportunity to talk to Milhaud, a friendly man without any pretense. I asked him how the conductor did. "He took too many liberties," Milhaud said, "I want to hear performers, not interpreters!"

Altman: He was one among many composer-conductors who were very matter-of-fact in conducting their own works. Milhaud did not object to some of the young girls in Ed Lawton's chorus from Cal, Berkeley, who sat in the front row knitting during rehearsals.

But there were unexpected problems. America was changing the pronunciation of Hebrew from the Ashkenazi to Sephardic. We were used to the Ashkenazi used in Eastern Europe but since the Sephardic was the language spoken in Israel the temples of Reform switched to Sephardic rapidly. The trouble was that all our music was written in Ashkenazi, so you can understand that we had a linguistic mishmash for a while.

But the performance went very well and for many years was a main staple of our liturgy since Cantor Joseph L. Portnoy liked the music, and liked to sing it.

Milhaud also contributed a lovely L'cha Dodi and a rather demanding setting of Shim'u Banim (Hear, ye children), the latter for inclusion in Cantor Rinder's book entitled Music and Prayer. This is important Milhaud, but unfortunately almost unsingable because of the tessitura, which is too high for a baritone, too low for a tenor.

Crawford: I read that he always sang in French at the Seder.

Altman: Yes. He was very Jewish-oriented and informed, and he was very friendly with Cantor Rinder, and the two were together often. Cantor Rinder lived just a block from the Temple on Jackson Street, and often at the end of a service, he would have everybody up to his place. I remember that with great affection. Particularly towards the end when Milhaud was very ill, he always used to say, "I'm not in good health." Nobody even knew he was Jewish.

Crawford: What about Mrs. Milhaud? I understand she's quite a character herself.

Altman: Yes. She is a very charming lady, very vivacious and a marvelous mate to him.

Crawford: You said musical?

Altman: Oh, she is an artist of the first order. She is a recitante. In other words, she reads poetry. If you want to know more about that, I would very much like you to talk with Jane Galante, who was with them often. On the last Saturday before leaving the United States for Paris we gave fifteen numbers of his Sacred Service at the Temple.

Altman: At the first performance of the Milhaud service we had baritone Stanley Noonan sing the cantorial parts and Cantor Rinder recite with the instrumental music as a background. I don't remember if I played it on the organ or if we had some strings play it, but we had a big orchestra.

Milhaud conducted, and he was blown up like a balloon and all this flesh. So he sat there, and to the person who played too late, he said finally, "I look at you. I smile at you. I do this to you, but you still come in an eighth too late." He was very genial, not at all concerned.

Crawford: But he was a correct conductor. He wanted things to be right?

Altman: Correct. That was all--not emotional. I found that also with some of the others who were like that. They never know their own music from memory.

Ben-Haim and the Psalms

Altman: Another smaller commission went to the Israeli composer Ben-Haim (originally from Germany). This was the result of my feeling the need for a festival K'dushah'. In this I had the support of Cantor Portnoy. It turned out splendidly and became a standard staple of the liturgy.

Cantor Rinder's last contribution in the field of commissions brought the setting of three Psalms by Ben-Haim. I, for one, was enthused over the inspiration, the richness of melody, and harmony, the many moods, the changing rhythmic patterns and the independent orchestral parts, et cetera.

Although the work had a successful premiere at Emanu-El, it never seemed to make the grade and is shamefully neglected.

The most brilliant is the last Psalm, which we gave usually as the "big anthem" for Erev Rosh Hashanah [Rosh Hashanah eve]. The solos sung by Marian Marsh with their high C are well remembered.

There is one problem which might be the reason for ignoring the work, namely the difficult organ part. Whether one contemplates a performance with orchestra or organ, one is in for a worthwhile, beautiful experience.

Cantor Portnoy

Altman: When Cantor Rinder retired, he was succeeded by Cantor Joseph L. Portnoy and for almost thirty years we worked together in perfect harmony. Let me stress right at the beginning that Joe was a much younger man. When Joe was interviewed by the selection committee and the question came up about his being a tenor when almost all cantorial parts were composed for a cantor who was a baritone, Cantor Portnoy reassured the committee, pointing out the years of successful service he had done elsewhere.

The situation was so challenging that I felt impelled to try my hand at composing a short service for him, which was then published by Transcontinental Music. These initial services were so crucial for the singers, the new cantor and me, that Joe was obviously more than satisfied and paid me one of the nicest compliments in saying, "You are a godsend."

As time went by his voice seemed to get lower and lower, so that within a few years he landed in the baritone range. It was lucky that I could transpose as this became necessary.

Soon after Joe was familiar with our setup we discussed my range of responsibility at the Temple. I explained that the Temple was always my first and most important job, but by no means the only one, and that I depended greatly on outside activity. Joe understood that my prestige and my ability to compete locally would suffer if he was director of music and I was simply organist. So it was agreed that Joe was called cantor and director of our religious school and I was organist-choir director, which described the situation fairly correctly. After this was settled, we hardly ever, if ever, had to refer to this settlement.

Joe Portnoy is a quiet, gently-speaking person, and you have to know him before you realize that he is absolutely brilliant and strong in sticking to principles. Musically, he brought many changes, but always gradually. The change was most noticeable in our collection of anthems to be sung after the sermon. These had been largely compositions in English and were taken from the works of the great composers.

Crawford: Can you name a few?

Altman: Haydn, Mozart, Franck, Brahms. Masterpieces. That was the style prevalent in Cantor Rinder's time and just right for worship then. Cantor Portnoy introduced a repertory of responses in Hebrew, stressing music with some Jewish lilt. Once I got the

Altman: drift, he left the choice largely to my judgment. Joe continued the practice of commissioning new works and hit the jackpot at least twice.

The first was a choral-orchestral work based on a text from Chronicles which was composed by Seymour Shifrin, a professor of music at the University of California, Berkeley. This modern work proved to be too difficult to be given by our musical forces at Emanu-El, but was very well received when given at UC and was performed by no less a celebrity than Seiji Ozawa, who performed the music also in Boston.

While the music is not easily grasped by the casual listener it has a very beautiful last movement. The composer died very young, a loss for us all.

The second commission of Joe Portnoy went to Sergiu Natra, an Israeli composer whom Joe met on one of his various trips to Israel. The two men hit it off and a new service was the result. I think that the music is beautiful and new enough to be different.

Ludwig Altman's Sacred Service and Commissions

Crawford: Did you commission works, too?

Altman: Yes, on a more modest scale.

The first time I commissioned a composer was in 1952. That year the American Guild of Organists held its national convention in San Francisco and we at Emanu-El had to live up to great expectations. The trouble was we had a paucity of worthwhile Jewish organ pieces, so I contacted Ellis Kohs, a very well-known composer from Los Angeles, to write settings for organ of three Jewish melodies. These proved so successful that they were published in 1952 under the title Chorale Variations on Hebrew Hymns.

The second time I asked Herbert Fromm to compose a setting of a melody related to the Yom Kippur liturgy, which he not only accepted but enlarged into a cyclical composition in which the original piece is now called "Fantasia." In this form it has been published by Transcontinental Music Publications. Fromm is a leading Jewish composer, fulfilled by his writing for the American Reform services.

Altman: My third commission went to Karl Kohn, professor of composition at Pomona College in California. I became drawn to his music when I heard some choral works of his given at a festival of modern music at which Copland and Stockhausen participated. I asked Kohn for organ preludes for the three pilgrimage festivals, for which we had little written so far. He obliged and hopefully his work will eventually be published by the prestigious Carl Fischer, who has Kohn under contract.

My last commission, the fourth one, gave me great satisfaction. I had asked David Sheinfeld, a local composer, for an organ piece incorporating some part of the Kol Nidre chant. David was for many years a member of the violin section (first violin) of the San Francisco Symphony and we had many talks together at rehearsals, et cetera.

His music was so strong, so new in an interesting way, that it was performed by almost all of our symphony conductors, beginning with Pierre Monteux, who encouraged David. Other great conductors, like William Steinberg and Seiji Ozawa, performed his music which, by the way, was not easy. Smaller ensembles commissioned him, too, and made him well-known nationally. His string quartets were taken on tour by top-notch musicians.

When I approached him about writing an organ piece for the synagogue he admitted that he did not have the faintest idea about the workings of the instrument, especially not of so huge a one as the one at our Temple.

We had two choices. I could have shown him the regular or "normal" workings of the organ or we could take the riskier road and just show him how to turn the motor on and off and let him find everything out by himself!

David Sheinfeld, not only a wonderful musician who was full of musical inspiration and ever surprising his listeners, came through with flying colors! His work, entitled Elegaiac Sonorities, uses the organ in ways I had never heard or thought of before. His composition cast a spell when I presented it for the first time at one of my year-end recitals, co-sponsored by the local branch of the Goethe Institute. This work was also accepted for publication, although it is not easy to get acquainted with the unorthodox notation. I was fortunate to have had the composer explain and decipher it for me.

Crawford: What about Cantor Rinder's music?

Altman: He composed a few hymns.

Crawford: He arranged a Kol Nidre?

Altman: The Kol Nidre exists. That is a basic Jewish melody; we don't know who composed the melody. But you have to make it into a presentable thing for a service, and many Jewish people have done that. Cantor Rinder's version he published. I can show it to you, but every cantor has a different one.

Crawford: Nothing so extraordinary?

Altman: I hate to say that because it might give the impression that I am disloyal, but it isn't that.

Marc Lavry

Crawford: Let's move on to Marc Lavry, who I understood wrote something marvelous in the way of a service.

Altman: Marc Lavry came from Israel. When he saw me and got hold of me, he was beaming and [he] said I had come to his rescue and I was wonderful. So I helped him as much as I could preparing the choir and so and so. And then we had an orchestra, and the whole thing was given. I thought it was a wonderful piece. But very serious musicians, whose opinions I had to honor, said not so, it is cheap, more like movie music.

I don't know what happened. It was given first in New York in the Temple Emanu-El, and he conducted it. It was given here and probably some other places, but it didn't make the grade.

Crawford: Somebody described it as having Arabian elements; he was the head of the Israeli Symphony of the Air?

Altman: Yes, he was with the radio over there. But the work proved to be a flop ultimately. For one thing, it is not published, at least not as he had written it, and only a few small numbers were published in an Israeli publishing house. It is not very impressive. It has a very charming L'cha Dodi which I have given many times when I was in charge. Now I'm emeritus, as you know.

Crawford: When these works were premiered, did the public at large get to hear them?

Altman: Yes. The public was invited. The publicity was always excellent, but Cantor Rinder shied away from straight criticism. He was just as happy if the critics wouldn't come. He always claimed that they didn't know much anyway, but the general publicity was strong, and we always had good turnouts.

Funding for Composers

Crawford: Did the Temple pay the commissions?

Altman: Yes.

Crawford: So it raised the commissions among the congregants?

Altman: There was no problem.

Crawford: There was never a problem getting money?

Altman: Cantor Rinder was marvelous at that. Once he arranged something, he didn't worry about underwriting it. They didn't even argue with him.

Crawford: I read that after the Ben-Haim performance there was money left over, and so they started a Rinder Music Fund for commissionings.

Altman: If the Temple wants to commission something in which there is a fund or no fund, they do it.

Crawford: They have enough patrons?

Altman: I don't know. I would think so. These amounts are so small.

Crawford: Let's see. The Marc Lavry commission was $10,000, and that was twenty years ago.

Altman: That would be today a really huge amount.

Programming at the Temple

Crawford: Did Cantor Rinder establish annual recitals before you came?

Altman: It was not that regular, no. It was usually connected with an anniversary of the Temple. You know, they were very eager to have the 110th Anniversary, the 115th.

Crawford: They did pieces like the Honegger King David and Handel oratorios?

Altman: Yes. And all of the Elijah. It was a staple and the temple really wanted it for those anniversaries.

Crawford: Did you help program those?

Altman: That was mostly Cantor Rinder. Usually it was an outside group which came. The most frequent was the Cal chorus. We had some funny experiences. When they performed at the Stern Grove, Cantor Rinder would say to our own choir, "Be sure to put on that your copies belong to us at Temple Emanu-El." We laughed because our copies read, "Property of U.C. Chorus"!

A New Era at Temple Emanu-El: Choosing a Successor

Crawford: You left the Temple as organist in 1986. How did you choose a successor?

Altman: The congregation said, "You pick the person. Give us two names, and we leave it entirely up to you." So that put me on the spot. I tried to get a Jewish person, because I feel the position is so important and so outstanding.

The only person I could even find who would come was a girl from the East, but there were some things which I didn't like because she had no job. She had had a job originally, but she lost it evidently, and then she had a church position as musical director, but after having her for a number of years, they didn't give her tenure.

Crawford: Did you hear her play?

Altman: No. Because the playing alone is not what does the trick. The organist has to also be able to conduct a choir and has to please so many people.

Crawford: Did you conduct a national search?

Altman: No. We didn't go that far because I knew how it would end. It would end up with a first-class Christian! And for that we didn't need a national search. Also it's only a part-time job. You're not supposed to sit from morning to night. I never did that, but I had no idea five years before when I had the heart attack how much I had worked.

Crawford: I do know how much you worked.

Altman: Unbelievable! I worked every day and usually through the evenings and the night for all my life.

Crawford: You were a hard worker, but you had a passion, too.

THE CONGREGATION EMANU-EL

Arguello Boulevard and Lake Street • San Francisco

The community is cordially invited to attend a
Special Sabbath Service
in honor of
Ludwig and Emmy Altman
upon his retirement
as Organist-Choir Director of Congregation Emanu-El

Saturday, the twenty-first of June
Nineteen hundred and Eighty-Six
Ten-thirty o'clock in the morning
in the Temple
A reception will follow

Emanu-El organist to retire after 50 years' service

THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA JEWISH BULLE

JUNE 20, 1986

By PEGGY ISAAK GLUCK
Of the Bulletin Staff

Ludwig Altman still might be the organist at the Neue Synagogue in Berlin, one of seven liberal congregations in that German city, if it hadn't been for Hitler.

In 1936, the head of the Berlin *kehilla*, the Jewish community, told the young organist he had a lifetime position with the great synagogue. "That was four years after Hitler's rise, and they still thought it was reasonable that the Nazis wouldn't last that long," Altman remembered.

Altman, who will be retiring at the end of this month in his 50th year with San Francisco's Temple Emanu-El, said leaving Germany did take a toll on his potential musical career. But his flight in 1936 opened a new career — a lifetime one, at that — in America.

The organist, trained at the Universities of Breslau and Berlin and at the State Academy for Church and School Music in Berlin, said he looks back fondly at his career in America as he prepares for his upcoming retirement.

Altman will be the honoree at services at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow at Emanu-El, Arguello Boulevard and Lake Street, S.F., where all liturgical music will be of his composition. A number of his colleagues will speak, including violinist David Schneider, Grace Cathedral's organist John Fenstermacher, S.F. Civic Chorale director Winifred Baker, columnist Robert Commanday, and Jimmy Schwabacher, plus Emanu-El's rabbis and cantor.

When Altman left Germany for America in 1936, he found he could have his choice of jobs. He auditioned for jobs with synagogues in New York and Chicago (and was offered both), but opted for San Francisco because a number of his relatives lived here. The weather was awful in the Eastern cities in January and February, "and in San Francisco the sun shined," he remembered.

In other ways, however, San Francisco didn't hold the promise of the East, Altman said — meaning that he didn't get a job as a synagogue organist immediately. Instead, he became a piano teacher at the San Bruno Settlement House, a community center for Jewish immigrants in the Portola District, and was a substitute for Emanu-El's organist, Wallace Sabin. Often, he would take over in mid-piece for Sabin, who was in ill health. "He died in 1937, and I just continued what I'd done."

In the past 50 years, Altman said, he has seen Jewish liturgical music go through a cycle. First were the American composers, then composers from Germany and Central Europe "made their contribution," he explained. Now, he said, liturgical composition has moved back to America. The music itself "is more dancelike and with instruments such as guitar," which has lessened the importance of organ music, Alman observed.

However, he added, Jewish liturgical music "will always swing various ways with the times. Change is constant, even in the field of Jewish music."

Jewish music in general, he noted, "is very individualistic, because every synagogue has a different tradition. [Temple Emanu-El] is no exception." But, he continued, "we are credited with an exceptionally fine and ambitious musical program."

In his years with Emanu-El, Altman's favorite piece has been Darius Milhaud's *Sacred Service*, commissioned by the synagogue in 1949. The music of this piece, Altman said, contradicted what members of the clergy and congregation liked, because it "was on the dry side." But "Milhaud was a great Jewish composer, and that piece will carry the idea that there was Jewish music," he said.

Altman also has had a varied career in the secular music field. He presents recitals at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco every other weekend, alternating with Fenstermacher. He was the official organist for the San Francisco Symphony for 33 years, "appointed by Pierre Monteaux, and I've played under all its great conductors." He has presented many concerts in this area, and, for the past 25 summers, has concertized in England, Germany and Switzerland. The University of San Francisco presented him with an honorary doctorate for his music.

Altman still is working on a number of other projects. An album of his organ compositions, *The God of Abraham Praise*, has just been released by the Sacred Music Press of Ohio. And this summer, he will be continuing a pet project — notating an unknown piece by Mozart that he described as "a story in itself."

The piece is contained in an Swiss organ clock built in 1770. "It was music by Mozart but never notated because it was done right on the organ pins," Altman explained, describing the organ clock as about six feet tall "with 32 little pipes."

An organ clock "operated a set of organ pipes that played all kinds of music," with a merry-go-round type of sound, Altman explained. Other composers, including Haydn, Beethoven, Handel and some sons of Bach, were known to have composed pieces for the offbeat instruments.

Altman and his wife, Emmy, plan to spend the month of July in a small town in Switzerland where the clock is located, continuing work that he began about five years ago.

He will plans to continue practicing on Emanu-El's sanctuary organ a few times a week, depending on the schedule of his successor, Michael Secour.

Altman also will continue teaching. He said he's trained numerous students, many of them in good positions today, though none with synagogues.

Actually, this is one of Altman's laments in looking back at his career. "Unfortunately, Jewish people do not take to becoming organists, and that's disappointing. There was one generation like mine," he said, listing a number of Jewish organist-composers in the United States, "and we all know each other. But the whole bunch — all Jewish and organists — are getting too old.

"Even my successor at Emanu-El is Episcopalian, but I came after an Episcopalian, too."

X RECITALS AT TEMPLE EMANU-EL

Crawford: What would you like to say about your recitals at the Temple? I'm very interested in what you programmed.

Altman: They came about in a very funny way. In about 1950, the German consul general, who was extremely musical, arranged for a concert and it fell through for some reason--I don't remember what. So I got a call from him saying, "We would like you to give an organ recital for the German consulate sponsored by us. Would you be willing to do that?"

There was a certain problem about that because while we always like to play, I, a former German Jew, had to consider that this was the official organization of the German government. So I said that I had no personal feelings about that, expecting to be asked for a recital date the following year. I said, "When do you want it?" "Next month, in December," he said. I said, "We cannot really mount it so soon. Can't it wait?" He said, "No. To tell you the truth if we don't spend the [concert] money this year it goes back to the fund in Bonn."

So they had to get rid of the money. That's how they engaged me! And it was a colossal success.

After I had that first concert for the German consulate, it was then taken over by the Goethe Institute which just came to San Francisco then. It was going "great guns" by the way--still in operation. They were the ones who then always hired me. It was a foregone conclusion that after I played my one recital, then the next year we'd do it again.

Thirteen times I played for them. I played the last one in '82 or '83. I played for thirteen years in a row, and after the first one for the German consulate, my concerts were sponsored by the Goethe Institute.

Crawford: Those were always at the Temple?

Altman: Always at the Temple and always with novelties. I'm making a list by the way of the things which I programmed. It's fantastic. Apologies for bragging.

Crawford: I know of one program that offered local premieres of works by Bach and Schoenberg. And then, of course, the first Art of the Fugue in 1949.

Altman: Yes. That was the most important one.

Crawford: Before the late sixties, did you give recitals?

Altman: Yes and no. I didn't give any straight organ concerts except my initial debut one because there was a foolishness with the acoustical plaster.

Acoustics and Remodeling

Crawford: We should talk a little more about that now. How was that begun and why? I understand it had to do with Rabbi Reichert.

Altman: The Temple was overacoustical. In other words, the reverberation was so strong that everything was indistinct. That bothered Rabbi Reichert because the people couldn't follow his sermons, which were very often outstandingly fine.

Crawford: What was the surface of the inside?

Altman: Stone. And so it was decided to get some plaster there, which was done. It took about a half a year. The whole scaffolding went straight into the huge dome. And then to make it worse, they also plastered into the organ loft, which was not provided for in the specifications at all.

Crawford: Just a mistake?

Altman: No. The contractors wanted to do us a good deed. So when that was done and the scaffolding went down it was heartbreaking. The organ sounded like a chamber organ.

Crawford: No resonance?

Altman: It was dead. You could hear the counterpoint very well, but that was about it.

Crawford: You could hear the voice better?

Congregation Emanu-El

and the

Regional Convention of the American Guild of Organists

PRESENT

The First Complete Performance of

J. S. Bach's

"THE ART OF THE FUGUE"

in the Orchestration of Wolfgang Graeser and Ludwig Altman

MEMBERS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

(Donation from the Recording and Transcription Fund of the American Federation of Musicians)

HERBERT JAN POPPER, *Conductor*

LUDWIG ALTMAN, *Organist*

THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 7, at 8:15 P.M.

TEMPLE EMANU-EL, Arguello Blvd. and Lake Street, San Francisco

Altman: Well, I don't know even about that because as soon as that was done, they started with amplification.

Crawford: It must have been sad for you.

Altman: That is not the word. It was dreadful.

Crawford: What year was that?

Altman: Oh, I would say around 1940.

Crawford: Just after you came?

Altman: Well, yes, maybe even sooner, maybe '39-'38. I heard it in the very beginning, and I know that people complained they couldn't follow a fugue too well, so I would say it was about that time.

Crawford: But the organ had been a very exceptional organ?

Altman: It was a beautiful instrument.

Crawford: What did it do to the organ sound, the plaster?

Altman: Deadened it. It sounded, I wouldn't even say, soft. It sounded dead--had no after-sound.

Crawford: Have you modified that?

Altman: Well, there was a problem for me because Cantor Rinder had designed that organ, and he thought it was the most wonderful thing under the sun.

Crawford: How did he design it? You mean he asked for the combinations and so on?

Altman: He had Wallace Sabin to guide him, and then the builder, Ernest Skinner came. But Skinner was a very determined man. I'm sure nobody had anything to say. So it was designed that way.

So I had to be very diplomatic in getting money for making changes in the organ to compensate some for this colossal loss of sonority, and I explained it on those terms. Altogether I made twenty-seven changes in the construction of the organ, and it's just as well that I mention it now because later on I might be attacked.

An organ is built for a specific room. Right? And if that room changes, the organ must be changed to accommodate for the change because then it's a new room. And so I said, "This is now a new sanctuary. And this organ--the way it is now--is wrong for the sanctuary. And there must be changes and additions." When I

Altman: did that, it didn't mean that I changed every stop just to make it louder. As a matter of fact, we got quite a few new stops after this debacle.

I meant to have it sound full and majestic in the new sanctuary. I think it does. It's not the loudest organ in town, it's not the biggest, of course, but I think it's the most majestic and beautiful one.

Crawford: The most majestic. That's interesting. What did you do specifically? You changed various stops, I assume.

Altman: Well, there were several things I did. For instance, let's say a division was deficient in something. I would exchange stops so that a better-suited stop would go on the wind chest of that one.

Organ pipes stand on various wind chests. Some wind chests have many outlets, and it's more crucial that better-suited stops go on wind chests which have more or several outlets.

Then we got in quite a few new ones, too, and we raised the number of ranks--or stops--to seventy-five. We have seventy-five ranks now on the organ.

It is not an awful lot for the size of the auditorium, which is very large, but with those you can make an awful lot of fine noise. You can make the windows shake! And very fine solo stops and beautiful ensembles.

Crawford: So the organ was eventually just the way you wanted it to be?

Altman: Yes, and at the same time, it was much more in accordance with the ideas and ideals of present time. It had certain stops, outlets, which it didn't need, and those outlets I then used to put new pipes on. The big expense in an organ is--funny to say--not the pipes but the immense amount of the mechanism going into it. Let's say the pipes we could get for a thousand dollars, but the mechanism to put them in, it might cost you five thousand.

Changing Trends in Organ Building

Crawford: You said the sound ideal changes. Talk a little bit about that.

Altman: We go back now to our ideas about organ construction and the selection of stops. If you had a fine organ builder in 1920--let's say somebody like Ernest M. Skinner--then the idea was to make the organ into a substitute or the equal of a symphony orchestra--one of the reasons being that if you lived in a

Altman: smaller town at that time there was no orchestra. So the organist in a way provided symphonic music as an orchestra would do today.

So the organs were built along those lines then--to build solo stops which would have sounded as much as possible like orchestral solo stops, particularly woodwinds. Then the flutes made a large part of the organ construction and after flutes, woodwinds. They did that very well in that line, but now they know the organ must be an organ and not imitate an orchestra. And so we build this way now.

A lot of it is ignorance and half-knowledge, particularly the ideal of the Bach period is misunderstood in my opinion. The really old Bach organs are not at all like the ones built today so often in America with the idea that that is now the way Bach should sound. It is not so.

Crawford: What is the basic difference?

Altman: For one thing, our mixtures are much too shrill. We build them too narrow; we build them too high-pitched. There is nothing underpinning them. We use them wrong. We use them to make the organ play more brilliantly.

Crawford: And you think Bach didn't go for a brilliant sound?

Altman: Yes, he did, but he didn't produce it like that. Now with Bach, unfortunately, we only know that we don't know! We have that famous quote from Philip Emmanuel, who told us a story that whenever Bach registered his own playing and the organist saw him put the stops together they said, "Oh, my God, that couldn't possibly sound well." Then he played and they saw that it was fabulous. But Philip Emmanuel didn't tell us what he did. We have some knowledge, of course, from some of that copies he marked a little bit, but not enough.

Crawford: In Europe do they have what you consider to be a more authentic sound?

Altman: Yes. We want to be holier than the holy ones in this line, and I don't think it works too well.

Crawford: But you're saying there is a little bit of fashion-consciousness here.

Altman: Snobbery. It's already indicated by the way we call the stops. Have you ever looked at organ pieces? We use about six languages. We should standardize to call the same thing the same thing. But we don't do it.

More About Recitals ##

Crawford: What did you program for the recitals?

Altman: Well, the novelties were always musically very strong. They were not even necessarily obscure works by obscure composers, but very often complete cycles like Robert Schumann's Canons for the organ. Sometimes organists play the last two, but nobody played all six. Beautiful music. Those tidbits I did often for the first time.

Then the suite for the Hohensalzburg, that was a total novelty. Then I was asked to discover certain things of Mendelssohn which were not published before.

Crawford: That's interesting. How did you discover those?

Altman: Well, it was not in that sense a discovery, as if I went to a place and there in the oven was a manuscript of Mendelssohn, waiting to be discovered. It was not that. We knew of the pieces and where they were, but they were not previously edited for organ.

Crawford: How much preparation did you give these recitals?

Altman: A lot, because I wanted to play well.

Crawford: This was important for you?

Altman: Yes, because organ concerts usually are not reviewed. But my concerts were always reviewed.

I was the only local organist whose concerts were regularly attended and reviewed by the critics; I assume not for my sake but for their programming interest.

Crawford: It had to do with your playing, too; I think you are too modest.

Altman: There are many, many organists who play better than I, and I know that. But at that time, of course, I probably was much better than now.

Crawford: In Mr. Zellerbach's letter, he said there were sixteen hundred people on one occasion.

Altman: Yes--when we gave The Art of the Fugue. It was the biggest crowd I ever saw at the Temple, and the biggest success.

Crawford: About how many does the Temple seat?

To Ludwig Altman,
with gratitude for the
Bach Fugue. March 3, 1953
Yehudi Menuhin

Congregation Emanu-El

presents a program of

WORKS FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA

played by

MEMBERS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

(Donation from the Music Performance Trust Fund of the American Federation of Musicians)

GASTONE USIGLI, *Conductor*
LUDWIG ALTMAN, *Organist*

THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 8, at 8:30 P. M.
TEMPLE EMANU-EL, SAN FRANCISCO

Program

SONATA FOR ORGAN, NO. 1, IN E FLAT MINOR . . . *Hindemith*
Moderately fast — Lively
Very slowly — Phantasy, freely — Quietly moving

MUSIC OF MOURNING, FOR VIOLA AND STRINGS . . *Hindemith*
Slow
With quiet motion
Animated
Chorale: Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow
Solo Viola: ALBERT WHITE

1953: Autographed by Yehudi Menuhin.

Altman: About two thousand.

Crawford: You almost had a full house.

Altman: But for the High Holy Days they had additional chairs.

I could never see my way to give a concert when I couldn't make a definite cultural contribution. The word "contribution" looms very highly in my repertoire of words. I never went for what they always write--the big new things--a program had to offer something very specific. Only then would I take it to the critics, and that was it. It worked very well.

XI ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

Crawford: Our time is nearly finished. You wanted to add some thoughts here. [Mr. Altman wrote the following additions.]

Altman: May no reader get the wrong impression that this chapter intends to demote persons [by mentioning them] here rather than in the first section, when I was guided by my dedicated, interested and interesting interviewers, Elly Glaser and Caroline Crawford, whose fine work I deeply appreciate. As one ponders the past, persons and events come up, one bringing up another, and one must be careful not to drown in a flood of nostalgia and trivia. In retrospect, one's past looks often better than it deserves.

My memory goes back to 1941, when I approached Dr. Hans Leschke, conductor of the San Francisco Municipal Chorus. Dr. Leschke in the 1920s conducted the opera chorus of the City Opera in Berlin, and he came to San Francisco on tour. His great ability impressed the then symphony conductor, Alfred Hertz, so deeply that Hertz created the municipal chorus. This chorus of musical amateurs performed with the symphony orchestra the great choral literature led by Dr. Leschke. This project was immensely successful. Dr. Leschke liked my playing and made me the accompanist and organist.

My first job with the chorus was playing the organ in Beethoven's Missa Solemnis at Stern Grove in 1941. This was a great challenge to me because frequently the chorus would have no orchestra, and I had to play the entire score on the organ, assisted only by two pianists in the sections where the scoring was impossible organistically. I performed the great Passions of Bach, his Christmas Oratorio and the B minor Mass; Handel's Messiah, Honegger's King David, the Requiem of Mozart, the F minor Mass of Bruckner. All this Dr. Leschke conducted beautifully and fastidiously, so the reviews were unvaryingly complimentary.

The Leschke home became a center of musical-social life, with many parties and famous musicians dropping in, especially at the Christmas season. I recollect seeing Astrid Varnay and

Altman: Friedelinde Wagner, the granddaughter of Richard Wagner there. By the way, she was the only member of the Bayreuth clan who was not a Nazi but left Germany. She told us a funny story about how she stayed at a hotel on Market Street and phoned once to ask if there were any messages for her. The clerk thought that there were none, but evidently took no great interest. So Friedelinde to impress him told him that she was no less than the granddaughter of Richard Wagner. The clerk said he would look once more. After a few minutes he returned, regretfully stating that there was no Richard Wagner registered at his hotel, assuming that Wagner was otherwise hale and hearty.

Dr. Leschke died in June, 1973. During his last years Winifred Baker, a product of English musical education, had taken over as conductor of the municipal chorus on an interim basis. After Dr. Leschke's death, she became the permanent leader, renaming the ensemble the Civic Chorale. Miss Baker was well-equipped, as she had vast experience as a conductor of choruses of all sizes and styles. While Dr. Leschke grew up with the Germanic B's (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Bruckner), under Winifred the Chorale switched to English music, from the glorious madrigal school to William Walton and Benjamin Brittan.

She took and takes special interest in living composers, and this writer has every reason to thank her publicly and in writing for the interest she has shown in my choral works and for the many occasions [on which] she has included them in her programs locally and in the English cathedrals. All this was made possible through the loyalty and cooperation she inspired and receives from her various choral groups.

I hesitate and ponder what to say next, and I am asking the Muses to help me out as I switch for a very little time away from music to my impressions of social life in the United States as it contrasts with that in Germany.

Let me start by stating how much I, together with most of the German-Jewish refugees, was touched and reassured by the reception we received in our first contact with Americans in their natural habitat. Imagine, Uncle Sam would not let you land unless there was someone waiting on the pier, and that could mean a wait of hours and hours. Usually it was the person or persons who gave you the affidavit. Since mine came from San Francisco, I was fortunate indeed that good friends of my grandmother sweated it out and took me to their home in New Rochelle for the initial nights. Their names were Alfred and Rose Zadig.

There was so much to learn! Above all, self-control. When one meets someone at a party who does not hesitate to tell his life's history, how his wife kicked him out, how business was lousy, and about his hay fever, et cetera, one makes the

Altman: mandatory sympathetic face but should never refer to his woes, should one meet the person again. Or, if someone should express the desire to see you again or would like to know if you would visit his town as he would love to hear from you, it would probably be a mistake to take him or her up on this.

Does that sound rather ungrateful? If so, I would be disappointed because I just love this mode of social contact. It tends to take off the sharp and rough edges of social life.

In professional and commercial activity, the American is hard-driving, extremely ambitious and success-bound, so any kindness and helpfulness outside the fight for survival is doubly welcome, nay necessary.

As just one example, take the custom of addressing each other the democratic way. My barber is a young Chinese; he proudly calls himself Plato. He has no idea who his illustrious predecessor was. Me he calls, unceremoniously, Joe. God knows where he got the idea, but when I phone for an appointment it goes like this: "Hello, this is Joe, may I talk to Plato, please?" I love this ease, this good humor, this ready acceptance of each other's lifestyle, the tolerance of the other guy's opinions. This leads me to the final and ultimate question: Would I ever consider returning to Germany on any permanent basis? Emmy's and my answer, a resounding NO!

Have I at any time done anything good for a fellow musician beyond the ordinary? One instance comes to mind which hopefully will get me into heaven when my time comes. A harpsichordist from out of town was to play the entire Wohltempierte Clavier. I attended and took with me the score. One of the music critics spied this and asked to look on. I could not refuse, although I would have preferred to follow the music by myself. The artist, usually solid like a rock, had an off day. As wrong notes piled up more often than they should have, the critic gave me side glances to see if he was hearing right. He was known for his loving of a good and generous "schluck" and wanted to be assured by me as to the accuracy of his musical judgment. So I sat there not moving a muscle in my face, like a stone, and probably saved the usually fine performer from a panning.

How important to have one's priorities in proper order. I learned this lesson from Frank Fragale. Frank was the bass-clarinetist of the San Francisco Symphony and a composer as well. For years he was working on an opera based on the text of one of the great Shakespeare plays; I do not remember which one, Romeo or Macbeth. Frank let me see the score and I had to admire this devotion, his patience at a time when there were no copying machines like today, and so much more had to be written by hand.

Altman: Finally, the long-anticipated day arrived. Frank had coached the singers, among them the delightful Margo Blum, who was my student once. The opera was conducted by the second trumpet, Mr. Murray, whose father was the tuba player. The performance took place in a school auditorium in Berkeley, the press came, and truly Frank Fragale was king for a day!

The following day Frank was in seventh heaven, telling me that the expense had taken all his life's savings, all of this free time, his social life for years, yet that he felt well-rewarded as he had realized and fulfilled an ambition, his life's dream.

An example of the opposite, denying one's life dream, comes to mind. When I played for a small funeral service where special music was wanted; only the widow and a friend were present. The widow was crying bitterly and blaming herself because she had denied her late husband his last and only wish, to see his homeland, Austria, just once again--and now it was too late.

To mention some of the high points of my musical life, I would easily remember the first performance locally of Poulenc's Organ Concerto in G minor, which I played at the large Austin organ in the Civic Auditorium with Mr. Arthur Fiedler conducting. This was sponsored by the San Francisco Art Commission; the secretaries were invariably helpful to me. Thank you Joe Dyer and Martin Snipper.

The most meaningful music I made was without doubt my learning and playing Arnold Schoenberg's Variations on a Recitative, opus 40, first played at Temple Emanu-El, then at U.C. Berkeley, and even in Europe. My performance for an organ festival in Magadino on Lago Maggiore was taped.

One other splendid organ-orchestra work comes to mind: Alfredo Casella's Concerto Romano, which I did for the Art Commission with the Pops under Mr. Fiedler, who invited me to Boston where I did it with the Boston Pops and once more at a national convention of the A.G.O. [American Guild of Organists] at Temple Emanu-El. Then I played the entire organ music of Roger Sessions, including the Mass for Unison Chorus and Organ, with Sessions present.

By far the greatest impact was made, I believe, by my putting on for the first time Bach's monumental Die Kunst der Fuge [The Art of the Fugue with a chamber orchestra, cembalo, and organ], conducted by Jan Popper [in 1949 at Temple Emanu-El]. This was followed by doing the Musikalisches Opfer [Musical Offering] of Bach, conducted by Gastone Usigli.

Altman: Most people speak the truth, but only a few the whole truth--to which category do I belong? Other musical experiences which stand out above all others? Quite a few. Bruno Walter as guest conductor with the San Francisco Symphony, conducting Mahler's Second Symphony and the Requiem of Brahms. It brought back so many memories of the subscription series in Berlin's Philharmonic Hall, the Sunday morning final rehearsals and the concerts on Monday evening; my running up to the front as soon as the doors opened to get to the standing room on the left side where one had a good look at conductor and orchestra.

And now here in San Francisco I had the much greater thrill of being on stage with Walter, playing under the direction of the idol of my youth. On another program Walter did excerpts of Handel's Messiah. He did it the old-fashioned way, using the continuo part for special effects. He went to the trouble of writing twelve pages in his own hand, and asking me to stay after the orchestra rehearsal, seating himself next to me on the organ bench and expressing his delight in working with a congenial Landsmann.

These were some of the highest high points of my musical life. I see my readers yawn by now, meaning it is highest time to stop.

You are cordially invited
to attend a
Special Sabbath Service
in honor of
Ludwig Altman
to celebrate
the completion of the
Ludwig Altman
Oral History
and his
80th birthday

Saturday,
the twenty-fifth of August
Ten-thirty o'clock
in the morning
in the Sanctuary

A Kiddush will follow

The Northern California Jewish Bulletin August 10, 1990

SPECIAL SHABBAT SERVICE
IN HONOR OF
LUDWIG ALTMAN

PROGRAM

Welcome and Presentation ..... **Mortimer Fleishhacker**
President
Congregation Emanu-El

Presentation of Oral History ..... **Norman Coliver**
Past President
Western Jewish History Center

Remarks ..... **Cantor Joseph Portnoy**

Response ..... **Ludwig Altman**

Benediction Tribute ..... **Rabbi Robert Kirschner**

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Eleanor K. Glaser

Raised and educated in the Middle West. During World War II, spent two years in the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve.

Senior year of college was taken in New Zealand, consequently A.B. degree in sociology from University of Michigan was granted in absentia. Study in New Zealand was followed by a year in Sydney, Australia, working for Caltex Oil Company.

Work experience includes such non-profit organizations as Community Service Society, New York City; National Society for Crippled Children and Adults and National Congress of Parents and Teachers in Chicago.

After moving to California in 1966, joined the staff of a local weekly newspaper, did volunteer publicity for the Judah Magnes Museum and the Moraga Historical Society, and was the Bay Area correspondent for a national weekly newspaper. Also served as a history docent for the Oakland Museum.

Additional travel includes Great Britain, Europe, Israel, Mexico, and the Far East.

Caroline Cooley Crawford

Born and raised in La Canada, California.

Graduated from Stanford University, B.A. in political science. Post-graduate work at University of Geneva, certificate in international law. Degree in keyboard performance from Royal College of Musicians, London.

Copy editor for Saturday Review Magazine, 1973-1974.

Staff writer and press officer for San Francisco Opera, 1974-1979.

Co-Director for Peace Corps (Eastern Caribbean), 1980-1983.

Music reviewer for Peninsula Times Tribune and Bay City News, 1974-present.

Interviewer-editor in the Regional Oral History Office, 1985-present.